

Where Hollywood Meets China: A 'Legendary' Collaboration

by

Lara Herring

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Abstract

Title: Where China Meets Hollywood: A 'Legendary' Collaboration

Author: Lara Herring

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Media Studies.

Using Legendary Entertainment as a case study, this thesis examines the relationship between China and Hollywood during the years 2005-2017: the distribution and funding of films, the emergence of co-production partnerships and the geopolitical industrial landscape that has emerged as a result. By tracing the trajectory of Legendary's Chinese connections, from private investment, to state-financing, to its eventual acquisition by a Chinese company, this thesis explores the company's vested interests in the development of Chinese partnerships. Therein, this research defines a periodisation and terms to describe the different types of Hollywood-China partnership and interrogates the concept of "Chinawood". This includes an examination of the growth in the Chinese film market, the business strategies Legendary adopted to aid in developing relations with Chinese film industry institutions and the tactics employed by the studio to enter the Chinese market and cater to Chinese audiences. This thesis examines the promotion of Legendary's founder - Thomas Tull - as a brand ambassador for the company, offering new and valuable insights into the role of the producer. These findings contribute towards scholarship on industrial organisation; interrogating the distinctions between studio/financier/producer and how these are conflated in the trade discourse. Drawing on primary data from interviews with Hollywood industry personnel, the experience of working with and for Chinese production companies is explored. The successes and failures of *The Great Wall* (2016), a Legendary Entertainment and China Film Group collaboration, is used as a case study to examine the rise and fall of the Hollywood-China co-production. This data reveals key findings regarding the status of the contemporary

Hollywood-China relationship, demonstrating considerable insight and providing a valuable case study which exemplifies the current and recent state of transcultural/transnational relations between Hollywood and China in detail. The Legendary trajectory, as evidenced throughout this thesis, encapsulates the rapidly changing power dynamics of cultural exchange that has existed between the U.S. and China between 2005 and 2017, providing a snapshot of a fascinating and deeply significant period in the tumultuous relationship between the two film industries.

Introduction

In recent years China has re-emerged as a global superpower and Sino relations have been brought to the fore across all business, finance and culture sectors. The film industry is no different. In particular, the developing relationship between Hollywood - the dominant global film industry - and China - the world's fastest growing film market - has become one of the most fertile grounds for research in film industry studies. The key motivation for research in this area is to analyse the transformation of content and distribution models within the U.S. film industry and situate them within the power relations of global cultural and economic exchange and transnationalism. I situate Legendary within wider industrial trends in order to encapsulate a significant period in Hollywood-China relations. In doing so, this research asks the central question: how did Legendary Entertainment adopt and adapt its global strategies in order to gain access to and favour within the Chinese film market? This broad underpinning query is established and addressed by three key sub-questions. Firstly, to what extent was the Legendary strategy impacted by the Chinese market? Secondly, which of Legendary's films received a release in mainland China and how did they perform? How did Legendary's identity as a "post-postclassical" studio play into its China-strategy? Using critical media industry studies analysis, this thesis finally asks the question; how does Legendary's case study and the necessary analysis of wider political economic relations offer a periodisation of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship?

This thesis tells the story of the changes in the Hollywood-China relationship through Legendary at an important point in time when China was opening up to the global film industry and emerging as a primary export destination for Hollywood products and as a key revenue stream for the American film industry. As yet no such micro-history of Legendary exists. Recording Legendary's industrial history in this way enables an essential means of capturing the ever-fluctuating business landscape and in this case

also produces valuable and original insights into the complexities of emerging Hollywood-China co-productions and studio partnerships at a significant juncture in Hollywood history when the influence of Chinese investment and the Chinese film market led to industrial changes.

This thesis contributes towards and builds upon existing knowledge in four key ways. First, I provide an account of Legendary to make claims about what has happened to the notion of studio and producer and brand in Hollywood. Establishing Legendary's emergence as a company and their early strategies enables an interrogation of the distinctions between studio, financier and producer and the way that these concepts are conflated in the trade discourse can be examined. I label Legendary as a "post-postclassical" Hollywood "studio". I define the term "post-postclassical Hollywood" to refer to the most recent era in Hollywood's industrial organisation which follows on from the classical and postclassical eras. Post-postclassical Hollywood, specifically, marks a new period wherein studios and film products are constructed as brands and branding is the central and most significant characteristic of the era; where film production, funding, marketing and distribution are shaped by the logic of branding. The growth of merchandising and product placement and the rise in film franchises are key examples of post-postclassical Hollywood, as is the notion of the post-postclassical studio and post-postclassical producer. A post-postclassical studio is a U.S. production company that is branded as a studio while devoid of the traditional assets that characterise a Hollywood studio. As I show, Legendary is a typical example of a post-postclassical studio. The notion of post-postclassical producer is defined in the second key contribution to knowledge whereby I analyse the way in which Legendary's founder - Thomas Tull - is branded alongside the nascent company, promoting the attributes of the studio brand. Both Tull and Legendary are, I argue, financiers masquerading as producers. Tull's role as producer, then, is a process of branding, rather than a legitimate position. Tull's personal branding strategy is also, crucially, closely associated with his self-identification as a "fanboy". I show that Tull – a financier - is branded as a "fanboy-

producer/auteur” and that this enables the branding of Legendary as a fanboy-auteur brand. I investigate the fanboy demographic, its characteristics and its value - both in the U.S. and China - and how the Legendary brand was designed with this market in mind. This leads me to develop a new way of conceptualising the role of the financier as producer-auteur and of the notion of fanboy-producer/auteur. This role is an extension of what Naja Later (2018: 536) terms a ‘promoted fanboy’, or what Suzanne Scott (2013) refers to as a ‘fanboy-auteur’. Naja Later (2018: 536) explains that the term ‘promoted fanboy’ refers to, ‘auteurs who are hired to create cinematic or televisual adaptations of beloved texts to which they themselves have professed fannish adoration; thus, they are fans who have been “promoted” to official creator status’. I argue that the market for products made by these “promoted fanboys” or “fanboy-auteurs” has become so lucrative that a brand - Legendary - has been built on it. Thirdly, in charting through the Legendary timeline and the company’s connections with China, I identify and analyse a periodisation and terms to describe the different types of Hollywood-China partnership and interrogate the concept of Chinawood, as has been done with the relationship between Hollywood and American independent cinema (Tzioumakis, 2012). Furthermore, I chart within this periodisation the increased interest in Hollywood-China co-productions and the obstacles they faced as demonstrated by an in depth analysis of *The Great Wall* (2016). I show that the film, which was Thomas Tull’s idea, acted as a flagship for the ambitions of Sino-U.S. film collaborations but, ultimately, revealed the incompatibilities between the two filmmaking cultures and markets. Finally, this thesis augments existing scholarly work on transnational cinema by assessing and analysing the issues inherent both to the process of making a “fully integrated” Hollywood-China co-production and to making films for a combined Chinese and North American audience. I suggest that transnational cinema is problematised by competing soft power ambitions and differing market attitudes.

The relationship between Hollywood and China is significant for several reasons. While international financing and co-productions are by no means new to Hollywood, it is the

sheer size of the Chinese market that sets it apart from previous foreign partners. Between the years 2005 and 2017, the annual Chinese box office increased from just over \$300 million, to more than \$8.5 billion (Yang, 2016; Brzeski, 2017a) and the number of cinema screens increased ten-fold during the same time period, overtaking North America as the territory with the largest number of screens in 2016 (Schwankert, 2016). China's emergence as the fastest growing film market has established its status as a primary export location. This means that, creatively, Hollywood studios and producers have had to think of ways to appeal to an audience that is extremely different from its domestic market, which has therefore required a fundamental shift in style (Robinson, 2016). The promise of the return on the vested interests of both parties have led to unprecedented business deals, which are often unstable and commonly fail before they have begun. As with any investment, Chinese finance comes with certain stipulations. These include conditions for content that require co-productions to adhere to a 'subjective content-approval process', avoid certain taboo subjects such as sex, violence and religious or political issues and to represent China in a favourable light and contain substantial Chinese content (Kokas, 2017: 71). The 'promise of Chinese money', in this regard, has led to a 'remaking' of the Hollywood industry (Wolff, 2015). As international film markets continue to increase in audience size and financial yields, Hollywood is becoming ever more reliant on international box office revenues (Golding and Murdock, 2000; Schatz, 2009a; Balio, 1998; Balio, 2013; Mirrlees, 2013).

During the period 2005 to 2017, in tandem with the growth in the Chinese film market's size and financial value and punctuated by policy changes following China's entry to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Hollywood studios and producers experimented with attempts at establishing or developing inroads to the Chinese market. For my purposes the Hollywood-China relationship takes two distinct forms: the development of a transnational model for partnerships and co-productions and a process of globalisation in Hollywood's attempts to enter the Chinese market. In this sense, this thesis uses the term transnational to imply the extension of, or operations across, national boundaries,

whereas globalisation is taken to mean a directional flow. In my characterisation of Hollywood-China relations I refer to the adoption of a “China-focus” and a “China-strategy”. I use the term China-focus to refer to paying attention to or catering to the Chinese market. This includes the incorporation of Chinese elements or cast members into Hollywood films, seeking Chinese investments and co-production partnerships and an increased pressure on the Chinese government to ease film import restrictions. This China-focus picked up momentum around 2008 and reached a peak between 2012 and 2016, before dropping off significantly. This time period encapsulates a rise and decline in Hollywood’s China-focus and in Hollywood’s attempt at crafting a successful China-strategy. I use the term China-strategy to refer to the formulation and implementation of goals and initiatives taken by U.S. film companies to build and facilitate relations with Chinese partners, investors and collaborators. It is important to note that my research is focused on the U.S. perspective due to language barriers and access to information, and that any mention of China refers specifically to mainland China and not to the regions of Hong Kong, Taiwan or Macau. Hong Kong is considered in parts of this research but is identified separately and is not included in the term “China”.

Examining Legendary Entertainment provides insight into the relationship that developed between Hollywood and China during the years 2005-2017. Legendary was one of the first Hollywood studios to form significant ties with China and formed relationships with both private and public Chinese and Hong Kong companies. First, Legendary formed a strategic partnership with Orange Sky Golden Harvest (OSGH), a film production, distribution, and exhibition company based in Hong Kong. Legendary then formed a joint venture film production company based in Hong Kong called Legendary East, the purpose of which was to co-produce films with Chinese companies in order to bypass the quotas on foreign film releases in China. Legendary East announced a co-production agreement with China Film Group. The China Film Group Corporation (CFG) is the largest and most influential state-owned film enterprise in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and is responsible for letting any and all films into China,

as well as handling censorship matters. Most recently Legendary became the first U.S. film company to be bought-out by a Chinese company when it was taken over by Dalian Wanda International (Wanda) - the largest media enterprise in China. As a result of their multitude of connections with China, Legendary offers a significant insight into the relationship between China and Hollywood during this time period.

The Great Wall (Cháng Chéng) (2016) was a project designed to pioneer a new approach to Hollywood-China film collaborations and was pre-emptively heralded as a new blueprint for co-productions and cross-over success in both the Chinese and North American markets. The film was widely regarded as a failure due to underwhelming box office returns and a negative critical consensus in the trade press and mainstream media. This thesis analyses the film, considering its pre-production, production, marketing and reception, assessing its apparent success and its failures. Cultural negotiation plays a role in all of these areas. As Weiying Peng (2016) notes, generally speaking Sino-U.S. collaborations fall into two categories: firstly, those that are mainly, or partially, invested in by U.S. companies but produced by Chinese companies, which are usually focused on the Chinese market and have little international influence. Secondly, those that are dominated by American companies, while Chinese companies only invest and assist in the productions via sharing the copyright in China, which tend to be successful overseas. In these examples, either the Chinese or the Hollywood side takes the lead. *The Great Wall* was designed to attempt to create a more collaborative co-production process by being jointly produced by both a Chinese and Hollywood studio in equal partnership, combining Chinese and Hollywood cast and crew and, crucially, creating a product pitched at both a Chinese and North American audience equally. This meant combining production systems, cultures and languages. Thus, *The Great Wall* encapsulates not only the differences between the two production cultures, but also the problematic consequences of combining them.

Hollywood-China relations 2005-2017

To understand Hollywood-China relations between 2005 and 2017 it is necessary also to have an understanding of Sino-U.S. relations more broadly. The relationship between politics, finance and cultural exchange is inextricable and to consider them separately is to consider only part of the story. Historically, the relationship between China and the U.S. has been characterised by misunderstanding and mistrust resulting from political opacity. In his work on the history of American policy towards China, James Mann (1998: 52) describes a relationship based on 'notions of secrecy and personalised diplomacy' during the Richard Nixon presidency, which continued into the Gerald Ford presidency. During the administration of President Jimmy Carter, Mann describes how, although Carter was able to complete the job started by Nixon of establishing diplomatic relations with China, he did so in a fashion that 'perpetuated both the secrecy and the mystique about China' (1998: 81) that had been fostered by the previous administrations. When Ronald Reagan assumed the presidency, his promotion 'reopened the contentious issue of Taiwan' (Mann, 1998: 116). Regan was, according to Mann (1998: 116), 'one of the two most fervent supporters of Taiwan in American politics' along with Barry Goldwater. Around the mid-1980s, at a time when there was a rising unrest in China and political protests ensued, Mann notes that the Reagan and Bush administrations 'consistently underestimated the tensions and cleavages that were emerging in China' and 'failed to recognise how intense was the appeal of Western-style political values' during this time period when China was opening up (1998: 155). The first term of Bill Clinton's presidency saw a U.S.-China relationship characterised by Clinton's human rights policy which underwrote his trade deal with China and a renewed crisis in Taiwan. In the second term, however, the administration's China policy changed, and the two countries agreed to 'build toward a constructive strategic partnership' (Zhao, 2016: 200). This change of policy was undermined when George Bush Jr. was elected as president. Shuisheng Zhao (2016: 200) suggests that Bush Jr.'s 'hawkish' China policy led to, 'a rapid cooling of the

bilateral relationship,’ and a shift (back) towards unilateralism and the strengthening of its ‘unipolar global strategy’.

Thomas Christensen (2015) describes Barack Obama as inheriting a China that was both cocky and insecure when he took office in 2009; emboldened by the 2008 financial crisis which had dealt a hard blow to the American economy. Around the same time, the U.S. had also suffered defeat in failed war efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, which undermined the country’s position of power in international affairs (Christensen, 2015) and put the new president in a weaker position. At this time U.S.-China relations were increasingly complex and had gone far beyond the more conventional issues that characterised the relationship in the past, such as bilateral trade, the RMB exchange rate, Tibet, and Taiwan (Li, 2016). Now, the relationship began to broaden to include tensions and disputes in the East and South China Seas as well as challenges in the Asia-Pacific and Trans-Pacific Partnerships, and also included key issues around climate change, denuclearisation, cyber-security, antiterrorism and poverty reduction (Li, 2016). In its first year in office the Obama administration was determined to avoid bilateral tensions but attempts to reassure ended up ‘overcooked’ and ‘counterproductive’ by late 2009 (Christensen, 2015: 252) and Obama’s first year ended in tension with China, with a significant defeat at the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Conference when the committee failed to reach an agreement (Li, 2016).

Despite the diplomatic obstacles, U.S. policy took a firm shift towards Asia. In 2009 the then-Secretary of State Hilary Clinton released a document detailing American plans to ‘pivot’ attention to Asia. This pivot document and the policies and ideas contained therein served to further exaggerate the political and cultural disconnection between the U.S. and China. The document and its impact on the China-Hollywood relationship will be covered in more detail in chapter one but it is important to note that since China’s re-entry to the WTO in 2001 and the country’s rapid economic rise, it was imperative for the U.S. to respond and - crucially - to develop profitable bilateral connections.

China became a member of the WTO in December 2001 (WTO, 2001), thus signalling China's integration into the global economy and the promise of relaxed barriers to trade. As a direct result, the foreign revenue-sharing film import quota was doubled from ten to twenty films, and China made significant concessions to U.S. entertainment industries, including opportunities for foreign investment in exhibition and distribution. However, the practical implementation of these developments was fraught with obstacles. Wendy Su (2016: 37) notes, 'The battle for control of the Chinese market has been a central concern of the Chinese government, a major source of frustration for Hollywood studios, and the subject of frequent quarrels between the two sides'. Hollywood accused the Chinese government of failing to comply with the terms of its re-entry to the WTO and placed a forceful pressure on the U.S. government to force China to comply. In 2007 the U.S. trade representative along with the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) filed a suit against China's restrictive policies against foreign companies. In 2010, the WTO ruled in Hollywood's favour; the import quota was extended, and China's monopoly over distribution was revoked. Alongside these significant policy changes were a number of reforms and incentives designed by the Chinese government to revitalise the Chinese film market and industry. These initiatives led to a surge in cinema expansion, a dramatic rise in China's cinema attendance and diversified market tastes. Both the enforced relaxation of trade barriers and the revelation of the potential of the Chinese market (first notably revealed by the success of *Titanic* (1997) in 1998 and then reasserted by the exceptional box office revenues of *Avatar* (2009) in 2010) led to Hollywood's increased interest in the territory.

The Hollywood-China relationship is inextricable from wider Sino-U.S. politics, not least because of the use of cinema as an exertion of soft power. Joseph Nye, who coined the term, notes that soft power refers to the power of economic or cultural influence as opposed to coercive 'hard' power, as 'the ability to shape the preferences of others' (2004: 5). As one of the most obvious cultural communicators, cinema's role in the

exertion of soft power is most evident in the example of Hollywood's dominance of the global film industry. Hollywood's dominance acts as a site from which the U.S. exerts its diplomatic and economic power. In an address in 2013 U.S. President Barack Obama referred to the role that Hollywood has played in this regard, praising Hollywood for shaping 'world culture', signalling the importance of Hollywood as one of 'America's economic engines' through which U.S. progress is communicated, stating 'entertainment is part of our American diplomacy' (Obama in Carroll, 2013). Claire Molloy and Yannis Tzioumakis note cinema's central role in the formation of geopolitical discourses, including its ability to imagine 'new geographies' and to connect (or separate) 'the concepts of boundaries and territories with ideas about nation and identity' (2016: 2). In this position of power, Hollywood situates itself as cultural negotiator, and in doing so employs cultural representation, cultural appropriation and cultural colonisation as a fundamental aspect of its nature. In order to protect China's domestic industry and to curtail the cultural influence of Hollywood, China uses import quotas, policy protection, and shareholder control. Wendy Su (2016: 7) argues, 'the Chinese government has effectively consolidated its authoritarian power through both an alliance and a tug-of-war with global capital and through the advancement of film-inclusive cultural industries'. This "tug-of-war" is particularly evident in the Hollywood-China relationship and is problematised by significant obstacles, in particular the fundamental incompatibilities between U.S. capitalism and Chinese socialism (the former promoting individualism, the latter, collectivism).

Thesis Structure

The chapters in this thesis follow a chronological pattern in sync with the macro-level developments in the contemporary China-Hollywood relationship and in the micro-level timeline of Legendary's China-strategy. In order to establish how a China-focus shaped or impacted Legendary's business model, it is necessary to establish what Legendary's

business model was to begin with. To this end, the first chapter charts the founding of Legendary and early evidence of their strategy. Phase one of the periodisation of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship is covered in this chapter which begins in 1994 and ends in 2010. Chapter one identifies and examines the way in which an image is constructed for Legendary's founder - Thomas Tull - to help establish a brand for Legendary as a fanboy-focused producer of large-scale Hollywood tentpoles. In doing so, it offers insight into the role of the producer by exploring the characterisation of Tull - a financier - as "fanboy-producer/auteur". Chapter one covers Legendary's early years during which the company was co-financing and producing films with Warner Bros. and analyses in the release details and box office performance of the films made by Legendary that were released in China between 2005 and 2010. This chapter also examines the first major step in Legendary's China-strategy, which took shape in the form of an investment deal with Orange Sky Golden Harvest. Crucially, this chapter establishes exactly what Legendary was; a "financier with benefits" and an example of a post-postclassical Hollywood studio. Here I interrogate the distinctions between studio/financier/producer and how these are conflated in the trade discourse. In chapter two, I study the years 2011 to 2015 and the second phase of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship, which includes an increased number of Legendary releases in China and, most significantly, the formation of an Eastern-arm of the studio, Legendary East. Chapter two performs a translocal study of the company. In my analysis of the Legendary China-strategy during this time period I consider the factors affecting Legendary's access to China and the ways in which Legendary - and other Hollywood studios - "pandered" to the Chinese market, the Chinese government and potential Chinese investors by including Chinese elements, shortening release windows and localising their marketing strategies. My analysis of Legendary East paves the way for the start of my critique of Hollywood's heightened interest in Sino-U.S. co-productions and the problematic nature of those productions. This leads onto the third chapter, which examines the production of *The Great Wall* (2016) using interviews from production personnel. Using this data I draw conclusions regarding the incompatibility

between the Chinese and Hollywood production cultures and identify key contingencies of successful transnational filmmaking. The third chapter encapsulates the third period of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship between 2016 and 2017. The fourth chapter in the thesis covers the response to and lessons from *The Great Wall* as well as the marketing of the film and delineates the fourth and final phase in the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship periodisation, which takes place between 2016 and 2017. I suggest that the film failed because it was unable to transcend the “Hollywood-China intersection”, a concept that I explore in detail. Chapter four also analyses the details of the acquisition of Legendary by Wanda Group in 2016. Finally, in the conclusion chapter I outline how the overarching findings of this thesis contribute to the field of film industry studies through the identification of the post-postclassical Hollywood era, the new conceptualisation of the fanboy-producer/auteur, and the periodisation and terms to describe the different types of contemporary Hollywood-China relationship.

Literature Review

This literature review is divided into four sections. The first section deals with Hollywood's historical periodisation, which is crucial in order to establish how Legendary fits within the industrial context. This thesis will show that Legendary is not a studio in the traditional sense and is rather an example of a new period of "post-post-classical Hollywood". In order to argue this, it is necessary to establish the previous periodisation of Hollywood's industrial history. The second section focuses on the notion of global Hollywood; in particular how Hollywood uses transnational, spectacle-based storytelling to create a global product. Understanding how and why Hollywood caters to global audiences is essential in order to analyse how it attempts to serve the Chinese market. The third section of this literature review outlines the history of the relationship between China and Hollywood. This underpinning knowledge enables an understanding of Hollywood's need and desire to export their product to China, and the techniques that Hollywood studios have developed to appeal to global audiences, and in particular, the use of transnational storytelling and employment of co-finance and co-production arrangements. Here the complexities of co-production partnership products are considered as well as the clash between Chinese and North American cinema cultures and the struggle for, or exploration of, a shared global community. The Hollywood-China relationship is explored in two key areas: a brief but essential historical backdrop, and an outline of the cultural obstacles that Hollywood faces in developing China-relations. At the heart of the Hollywood-China relationship are entangled political and cultural motivations. To that end, the fourth and final theme of this literature review explores cinema as an instrument of soft power and as a communicator of national identity. So much of the Hollywood-China relationship - both historic and current - is characterised and problematised by each nation's use and rejection of cinema as soft power and as a transmitter and transcoder of national identity. This research contributes towards existing transnational cinema studies by problematising notions of transnational cinema

as a result of competing soft power ambitions and incompatible promotions of national identity.

Hollywood Periodisation

In order to identify Legendary's status within the industry it is necessary to establish how the company sits within Hollywood's industrial machinations. According to film industry scholarship, Hollywood history is divided into key periods according to economic, stylistic and industrial changes. In order to situate Legendary within this wider contextual framework it is important to outline these periods and their defining characteristics. In her synopsis of the structure of the U.S. film industry between 1896 and 1960 Staiger (1985) charts a period in Hollywood history characterised by struggle over rights to and control over developing technology. Staiger notes that between 1896 and 1909 the industry moved from 'a structure of pure competition in production, distribution and exhibition to a structure of an apparent monopoly in production with efforts to monopolise distribution and exhibition' (1985: 387). Between 1909 and 1912, the industry was divided between licensed and unlicensed (independent) film manufacturers and by 1912 distribution alliances were constructed. Staiger (1985: 399) writes, 'thus, by 1917, feature film companies were merging and vertically integrating their production and distribution sectors'. This vertical integration of production, distribution and exhibition and the oligopoly of the Big Five Hollywood studios is what characterised the classical Hollywood studio system between 1918 and 1948. In David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson's work on *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985) the authors outline the establishment and standardisation of Hollywood, the formation of the classical Hollywood style, mode of production and the way it has responded to technological and social change. The classical Hollywood industry is characterised by five structural, industrial features: the division of labour, the means of production, film financing, the conception of quality and system of consumption

(Staiger, 1985). The classical Hollywood *mode of production*, as distinguished from style and industry, refers to its production practices and concerns the labour force, the means of production (physical capital) and the financing of production (Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson, 1985). Douglas Gomery (1986: 15) notes that during this time Hollywood utilised a 'factory system of production based on extreme specialisation of labour', Fordism, based on the decentralised manufacturing process innovated during the 1920s by General Motors Automobile Corporation.

During the classical Hollywood period studios owned all of the means of production and produced films in a factory-like Fordist fashion. Even film stars were mechanised in the method of creating, promoting and exploiting actors, known as the star system, in which stars were contracted to specific studios (McDonald, 2001). Douglas Gomery (1986: 3) categorises the Hollywood studio system of the 1930s and 1940s as 'oligopoly control through ownership of production, distribution and exhibition'. During this period, the eight key studios - known as the Big Five and Little Three - were responsible for and recipients of the bulk of production and profit. Gomery (1986) describes how these key studios controlled distribution and exhibition chains and therefore successfully controlled independent producers. Gomery concludes that this period of Hollywood history was relatively free from competition or corporate differences. Barry Langford argues that since the end of World War II Hollywood has had to reinvent itself several times 'institutionally, aesthetically and ideologically' and is likely to continue to do so in the face of future changes in society and ideology (2010: 282). Probably the first and most important post-war development to the industry came in the form of the divorcement of the major studios' stronghold over the production, distribution and exhibition industries. Following federal investigations of the film industry's structure and content known as the "Paramount decrees"; a decision made by the Supreme Court that ruled the self-regulated studio system amounted to, what Langford describes as, 'a cartel operating illegitimately to restrict market freedom in a given industry' (2010: 17). In 1948 the film studios were forced to divorce their production and distribution arms

from their exhibition holdings (Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson, 1985). These separations finally began to take place in the late 1940s, shifting the industry from a vertically integrated system to a horizontal integration (Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson, 1985) and the Big Five studios went from producer-distributor-exhibitors to producer-distributors. Along with the rapid growth of television and 'wholesale changes in post-war American lifestyles' (Schatz, 2008: 16) this led to a significant increase in independent production. Richard Maltby (1995) notes that this divorcement process characterised the post-war period until the 1970s by leading to a decrease in output as a result of the increase in production costs, as well as inspiring a rise in the demand for production value as a consequence of the increased competition amongst exhibitors. Barry Langford refers to the period 1945 to 1965 as 'Hollywood in transition' (2010: 1); a time when the 'cooperative quasi-competition' formed the 'same collusive architecture' that 'proved its Achilles heel and, in hindsight, leveraged the restructuring of the industry as a whole' (Langford, 2010: 17).

Following the classical studio era came the "post-classical" period. The timing, definition, limitations and prospects of this stage are contested but generally marked by a fundamental change in the Hollywood system. Some argue that the classical Hollywood style remains ultimately unchanged (Bordwell, 2006; Thompson, 1999) but most agree there was a shift in industry, style and ideology (see Langford, 2010; Neale and Smith, 1998; McDonald and Wasko, 2007; King, 2002). In post-classical Hollywood the old assembly-line (Fordist) model of film production was no longer sustainable and led to an increase in independent production. Hollywood thus exemplifies the transition from industrial to post-industrial labour (Miller, 2016). Toby Miller (2016: 108) writes, 'The U.S. film industry thus became a pioneer of the type of work beloved of contemporary management (post-Fordism). With jobs constantly starting, ending and moving, it exemplified "flexible specialisation" - a shift from lifelong employment to casualised labour'. Tino Balio (2009b) describes United Artists as 'the company that changed the film industry' because of the dramatic impact the company had on the way that films

were financed and the way that production companies were structured. In 1950, amid financial turmoil, United Artists was taken over by Arthur Krim and Robert Benjamin. United Artists was a studio without a backlot, meaning that production was ‘physically removed from studio oversight’ (Langford, 2010: 25). Douglas Gomery (1998) notes that during this post-classical period Hollywood was transformed by key innovations in business practices. Firstly, the transition to independent production, as pioneered by Lew Wasserman, an agent who moved into independent production by buying Paramount’s film library and heralding the era in which studios made money from their back catalogue (Gomery, 1998). Secondly, Gomery terms this post-classical period as the ‘era of the vertically integrated conglomerate power’ (1998: 51), as signalled by Steven Ross’ take-over of Warner Bros., turning it into Time Warner, and demonstrating how ‘Hollywood could serve as the base to dominate a plethora of media industries’ (1998: 52). In this ‘New Hollywood’, production became more fragmented, or ‘Post-Fordist’ wherein, as Geoff King notes, ‘smaller quantities of products are manufactured by a range of more specialised producers’ (2002: 6). According to King, this environment ‘helped to shape the contemporary blockbuster syndrome’ (2002: 6) where fewer and more expensive films are made designed to cater to a mass, increasingly global, audience. Douglas Gomery (1998) examines the changes to Hollywood business strategies that resulted from the innovations of Lew Wasserman and Steven J. Ross. Gomery (1998: 48) credits Lew Wasserman as being principally responsible for leading the development of independent production and initiating the first ‘New’ Hollywood. Among Wasserman’s pioneering achievements was his buyout of Paramount’s film library, thereby beginning, ‘a new era in which studios prospered by milking long-term value from their libraries of older films and TV shows’ (Gomery, 1998: 48). Wasserman went on to buy Universal in order to produce television shows at the same time as making films and introduced made-for-television films. Gomery establishes the ‘era of the vertically integrated media conglomerate’, crediting Steven J. Ross as leading ‘a new set of entrepreneurs to innovate the business strategies by which the Hollywood companies could and would take full and complete advantage of all possible television

‘windows of release’ in every market in the world’ which ‘led to more economic might and profit than had ever been realised in the studio era’ (1998: 51).

Maltby describes post-classical Hollywood as ‘the end result of the changes initiated by the Paramount decrees, the establishment of a new relationship with the television industry, and the switch of attention to a younger audience’ (Maltby, 1998: 23). In the same work, Murray Smith chooses to categorise the start of this ‘post-Classical era’ as ‘post-Fordist’, meaning a move away from standardisation and towards ‘flexible specialisation’ (Smith, 1998: 3). Tino Balio (1990: 39) refers to the 1960s as the ‘age of the conglomerates’ whereby all the major studios either became diversified as corporations themselves or were bought by conglomerates. According to Maltby (1998: 23), ‘in this New Hollywood the major companies, acting primarily as financiers and distributors, have gradually come to terms with a fragmentation of the audience, a concern with the ideas of demographics and target audiences derived from market research, globalised markets and new delivery systems’ (1998: 23).

The blockbuster format and its stylistic, financial and industrial characteristics are of a central concern to this thesis, since it is this format that Legendary strategically favoured and became famous for. Geoff King (2002) notes that the blockbuster - or ‘event’ film - strategy underwent refinement in order to try to re-establish stability in the absence of the relative security of the studio system. One of the key strategies developed to minimise risk was the idea of pre-sold properties, that is, films that were based upon books that already had an audience (King, 2002). Blockbusters use spectacle as a storytelling tool, or, as Suhel Ahmed (2001: 190) writes, ‘spectacle has always been cinema’s *lingua franca*. It transcends language barriers, culture, narrative forms and genres’. Blockbusters are able to appeal to the widest audience because they employ spectacle storytelling, which appeals to the most basic senses (Ahmed, 2010).

Sheldon Hall and Steve Neale explain one of the key reasons for making 'high spending' (blockbuster) films is because of the earnings from global markets and ancillary sources, which make it far more likely that such films will make a profit (Hall & Neale, 2010). Geoff King attributes the rise of blockbusters to the value of these film products that can be exploited in multimedia forms. He acknowledges that playing to a universal audience can generate narrative incoherence but argues that certain amounts of narrative ambiguity can "have it both ways", that is, have both narrative and commercial success (King, 2000). These films must necessarily pay attention to the interests and concerns of potential audiences in order to achieve commercial success, moreover, 'cultural resonances that might tap into the concerns of potential moviegoers are taken explicitly into account by market researchers' and feed directly into marketing and publicity campaigns (King, 2000: 9).

In his work on film industry economics, Edward Epstein (2005: 236) notes that studios' earnings are based on the success of a minority of their output; blockbusters which, when they succeed, 'are capable of generating such tsunamis of earnings that a single one can keep an entire studio afloat for years'. Epstein identifies similarities between financially successful blockbusters which he calls 'the Midas Formula' (2005: 236). Taking as an example the ten billion-dollar-earning films between 1999 and 2005, Epstein notes that all the films in that category are: based on pre-existing material, feature a young (child or adolescent) protagonist, have a 'fairy-tale-like' plot wherein a 'weak or ineffectual youth is transformed into a powerful and purposeful hero', contain chaste relationships between the sexes, feature 'bizarre-looking and eccentric supporting characters that are appropriate for toy and game licensing', depict conflict that is 'non-realistic, and bloodless' for a PG-13 (or below) rating, have a happy ending (a successful hero), utilise artificial effects to create 'action sequences, supernatural forces and elaborate settings and cast actors who 'are not ranking stars' (2005: 237-238). Legendary films embody this formula, as will be discussed throughout this thesis.

The blockbuster format films that Legendary went on to specialise in were only part of their wider corporate strategy, which was based almost exclusively on its branding. In his work on Hollywood brands, Paul Grainge (2008: 6) investigates how Hollywood uses branding to establish competitive distinction ‘through a rich interplay of logos and trademarks, especially significant in a blockbuster economy where licensing and cross-promotional tie-ins establish mega-budget movies as cultural and commercial events’. Grainge raises the question of how branding exists in cinematic culture and impacts on film experience and, ‘to what degree is branding a mark of corporate power and authority, or suggestive of uncertainties and contradictions in the attempt to manage the relationship between products and consumers’ (2008: 7). As will be shown over the course of this thesis, Legendary exemplifies the interplay between brand and audience and industry. Legendary appears as the antithesis of the classical studio era, having divested itself of every aspect of the vertically integrated studio system, save finance. Instead, Legendary’s “studio-as-brand” is built upon the nebulous and intangible and trades in fanboy fanaticism and Intellectual Property (IP). In doing so this thesis will contribute to the periodisation of Hollywood, with particular emphasis on its global focus.

Global Focus

In order to appreciate Hollywood-China relations between the years 2005 and 2017 it is necessary to ascertain the history of Hollywood’s global character. The importance of the international market and Hollywood’s global dominance has led many scholars to focus on globalisation (i.e. Miller et al., 2005; Trumpbour, 2002; Moran, 1996; Balio, 1996; Manning & Shackford-Bradley, 2010). As a term, globalisation has multiple meanings. Anna Tsing (2000: 332) describes globalism at the turn of the century as ‘multi-referential’ and encompassing a ‘variety of public debates and discussions’:

not only labour-and-capital-oriented fights about immigration, unionisation, downsizing, subcontracting, and impoverishment but also debates about the worldwide

spread of U.S. media productions, the role of national governments, the dangers and promises of multiculturalism, and the growing influence and proper management of new computer-based communications technologies (Tsing, 2000: 332).

Tsing (2000) suggests that globalisation is better considered as sets of projects, similar to the way that modernisation has been studied as a series of projects. Studies of modernisation projects consider three (or more) directions: firstly, their cultural specificity, secondly, the 'social practices, material infrastructure, cultural negotiations, institutions, and power relations' through which they work, and thirdly, 'the promise of questions and dilemmas brought up in modernisation programs without becoming caught in their prescriptions for social change' (Tsing, 2000: 329). Tsing (2000: 329) suggests that this analytical direction is 'equally useful' for studying products of globalisation. For the purposes of this thesis, Tsing's distinction of globalisation as a series of projects is utilised. Globalisation is taken to mean the transmission or movement of products, people and practices from one country to another and the interconnectedness between countries, leading to a state of integration as global cultural, economic and even political systems or networks (Friedman, 2012; Held et al., 1999). Michael Curtin argues that, 'globalisation of media...should not be understood reductively as cultural homogenisation or Western hegemony. Instead, it is part of a larger set of processes that operate translocally, interactively, and dynamically in a variety of spheres: economic, institutional, technological, and ideological' (Curtin, 2007: 9). In their work on *Global Hollywood*, Toby Miller et al. (2005: 109) deconstruct the concept, establishing that global Hollywood's 'commanding position' is entangled with 'U.S.-led capitalist expansion', and that its domination is 'uneven - fraught with resistance, failure and competition'. John Trumbour (2002: 1) describes how Hollywood's 'conquering' of cinema fundamentally shifted the power balance in the cultural industries where previously North America had been marginalised. According to Trumbour, Hollywood's domination of the global film market was secured during the interwar period when the U.S. film industry was able to exploit its five key advantages.

Firstly, its size; the U.S. domestic market was the largest in the world. Secondly, as a nation of immigrants, 'a sort of world audience', film producers were 'forced' to learn how to make films that would appeal to an audience from diverse backgrounds (Trumpbour, 2002: 19). Thirdly, the U.S. film industry was well organised and had the advantage of 'studios rich in land, labour, and equipment, the star system, professional advertising, and later extensive investment networks' (Trumpbour, 2002: 19). Fourthly, Trumpbour (2002: 19) lists Hollywood's 'ideology of optimism and happy endings', which contrasted the 'tragic realism' of European cinema. Finally, Trumpbour highlights the 'corporatist leadership' of the U.S. industry and its 'substantial vertical integration in production, exhibition and distribution' (Trumpbour, 2002: 20).

Aside from selling Hollywood films to the global audience, globalisation had a direct impact on the industrial infrastructure of the American film industry. Miller et al. (2005) introduce the New International Division of Cultural Labour (NICL), which highlights the global network of labourers and production. Even though Hollywood has welcomed international filmmakers and financiers to work in the industry since as early as the 1930s (Moran, 1996) the wake of the new global economy that emerged in the 1980s brought with it a new industrial landscape. Tino Balio (1996: 23) writes; 'changes in the global political and economic environment, particularly the commercialisation of broadcasting systems worldwide, created additional sources of profit. And on the horizon, still newer technologies offered even more intriguing opportunities for growth. Conditions such as these led to the 'globalisation' of the film industry'. This was a new type of horizontal integration, one that spanned across the globe, and in doing so tapped into international markets (Balio, 1996). Balio (1996) describes the innovative way that Warner Bros. dealt with globalisation by downsizing – focusing on film and television production and distribution, music recording and publishing and losing ancillary operations such as cable networking, sports and cosmetics amongst other things.

Tanner Mirrlees (2013) explores the production context of global entertainment through an examination of the cross-border production of entertainment media by state and corporate actors in country-specific media capitals, moving beyond the view that global entertainment media is produced by an essentially North American industry, located in the U.S., owned by U.S. businesspeople and staffed by a predominantly U.S. workforce. Instead Mirrlees (2013) suggests we have entered a new transnational space of entertainment production. In Allen J. Scott's (2005: 2) work on Hollywood as a geographical place and a cultural economy, he assesses how and why Hollywood's 'localised articulations of economic activity are so frequently endowed with large measures of productive efficiency, innovative capacity, competitive advantage, and historical durability, and why it is that globalisation, so far from dissolving away these features, actually tends to amplify them'. According to the NICL as outlined by Toby Miller et al. (2005) film and TV commodities are assembled on a transnational scale within local, regional, and national production zones. Two of the most fundamental and lucrative forms of cross-border entertainment production in the NICL are 'runaway productions' (a term used to describe when production tasks are outsourced to take advantage of cheaper foreign locales) and international co-productions (Miller et al., 2005). International co-productions are defined by Mirrlees as 'a media policy and business arrangement between two or more states and media corporations committed to the production of a TV show or film that intends to circulate in two or more national markets' (2013: 159). Co-productions come in two forms: equity (a strategic and temporary partnership that seeks maximum profit) and treaty (governed by a legal agreement) where the former is guided by an amicable agreement and the latter is a more formal agreement that falls into the realm of international relations (Mirrlees, 2013). The Instantaneous Worldwide Release is another indicator of globalisation (Davis, 2006; Miller et al., 2005), it helps to eliminate the windows of exploitation and increases demand for products. The increased significance of the Chinese film market has had an important impact on the closing gap between Chinese and North American release dates. Caitlin Manning and Julie Shackford-Bradley tackle the problem of how films

attempt to 'engage globalisation', that is, how they play to a global audience through a consideration of cinematography and storytelling mode in order to identify ways in which 'signs of globalisation figure within film texts and what formal strategies films may deploy to represent globalising forces' (2010: 36). The first level of this mediation, they assert, is in their distribution and marketing and list 'Global Hollywood' as the commercial nexus 'concerned primarily with the mega-profits of big budget films that are believed to appeal to the widest possible audience' (Manning & Shackford-Bradley, 2010: 49).

According to Miller et al. the significance of globalisation for the screen 'varies between concerns over U.S.-dominated cultural flow, as per cultural imperialism, the international spread of capitalistic production and conglomerates via the NICL, and attempts to govern the chaotic, splintered circulation of signs across cultures' (2005: 334). Toby Miller et al. (2005) highlights the link between Hollywood's success and globalisation, using political economy, cultural studies and cultural policy analysis. In a chapter dedicated to the growing significance of co-productions ('co-producing Hollywood') they assert 'co-production marks an important axis of socio-spatial transformation in the audio-visual industries, a space where border-erasing free-trade economics meets border-defining cultural initiatives...to facilitate a transatlantic investment highway' (Miller et al. 2005: 209) but make the point that the power still lies weighted at the Hollywood end.

China and Hollywood Relationship

The history of the relationship between China and Hollywood is complex and can be divided into several key phases. The first phase of the relationship between China and Hollywood starts with their first interactions at the advent of the cinematic format and encompasses the formation of Classical Hollywood Cinema, leading up to the end of the

Second World War and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Cinema had a relatively liberal beginning in China, and certainly not an anti-American one (Ye, 2003; Latham, 2006). Kevin Latham (2006: 159) suggests that these early years (for Latham this encompasses the years 1896-1949) were 'a time of technical, artistic, and entrepreneurial experimentation' in China. China did not resist the introduction of cinema in the way it mistrusted other Western influences and copied Hollywood technologically, but not thematically; Yongchun Fu (2014a) notes that in the 1920s and 30s the Chinese distribution system openly mimicked the Hollywood model until it grew into maturity and its uniqueness emerged. Yiman Wang writes, 'the various forms of Sino-U.S. filmic interactions are both stimulated and plagued by Hollywood's simultaneously enamoured and embattled relationship with East Asian (especially Chinese) film industries and markets' (2012: 145). During this time Hollywood did not consider China as competition in the international market, but rather as a 'source of exoticism to attract its domestic audience' (Ye, 2003: 13). 'Oriental' representations in Hollywood films at this time were stereotyped but not always negative (Ye, 2003). As Yongchun Fu (2014b) points out in his work on the influence of American intermediaries on the Chinese film industry, the expansion of Hollywood and development of the Chinese film industry were not mutually exclusive, 'in a rapid growth market such as China in the 1920s, the output of the Chinese film industry and that of Hollywood could increase simultaneously alongside each other' (2014b: 17). Hollywood was attracted to China as a potential site of expansion owing to its exotic scenery and cheap materials and labour, and even established its first joint venture in 1926 – the American-Oriental Picture Company – but was ultimately deterred by the breakout of the second Chinese Civil War (Ye, 2003). Notably missing from both Fu and Ye's analyses of the relations between the two at this time is any mention of the 1924 Immigration Act, or the previous Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, both of which, Hye Seung Chung (2006) asserts, fostered an anti-Chinese xenophobia which was 'translated throughout the following decades, into abhorrent cinematic images of emasculated, opium-addicted coolie labourers or derivatives of the archetypal enemy to the white race, Dr. Fu Manchu' (2006: 63). Zhiwei

Xiao notes that Chinese audiences objected not to the negative portrayals so much as the unbalanced representation; presenting only the 'evil' characters and never the 'good' (1997: 37). Xiao (1997) also draws attention to the origins of censorship in China as a direct response to the negative portrayal of Chinese characters and the Chinese nation. The representation of China in Hollywood cinema has also had an effect on Chinese national cinema, as pointed out by Lily Wong (2013). Wong (2013) asserts that the cultural production exchange between China and Hollywood in the 1930s, and in particular the influx of Hollywood films in Shanghai at this time, had a lot to do with the politicisation of Shanghai film that resulted from the backlash to representations of China and Chinese people in Hollywood films. This backlash inspired a newfound 'nationalist sentiment' amongst Chinese people and at the heart of discussions over Chinese representations was the portrayal of Chinese women who, in the U.S., were equated with prostitutes (Wong, 2013). The cinema became 'an ideological battleground through which these political, social and cultural tensions were played out across the Pacific' (Wong, 2013: 2). The misrepresentation of Chinese people and culture in Hollywood inspired Shanghai left-wing intellectuals and filmmakers to become politicised to counteract the Hollywood representation (Wong, 2013). In response to Hollywood's portrayal of Chinese women as prostitutes, Shanghai filmmakers presented prostitutes as virtuous and as lobbyists for social change, and in doing so 'the Chinese prostitute's body, both physical and ideological, becomes a microcosm of the nation – both the U.S. and China – at large and it is through the appropriation of the prostitute's body that these tensions, promoted between the Hollywood and Shanghai industries, manifest themselves' (Wong, 2013: 3). Lisa Funnell (2010) draws attention to the double standard in the Hollywood casting system pointing out that white actresses have historically often played Asian parts, a process known as "whitewashing", while the opposite is extremely rare. In his work on the representation of Asian Americans in the 1930s and '40s Hye Seung Cheung (2006) asserts that towards the end of the sound-era films relationships between two 'Orientals' had to be mediated by 'white actors in yellowface' (2006: 60).

While civil war was devastating China, Hollywood had come to dominate the film market and China welcomed products from the 'dream factory' to distract them from warfare, Ye writes, 'if, in the previous phase, China was Hollywood's source of exoticism, now...it was the Chinese who enjoyed exoticism from America' (2003: 14). The Chinese also standardised their filmmaking format during this time, learning the technique from Hollywood, through intermediary 'matchmakers', according to Yongchun Fu, who writes that American practitioners came to China, bridging the respective film industries and 'making significant contributions to the evolution of the Chinese film industry' (2014b: 8). Fu (2014b), who characterises the study of Chinese film history as being dominated by a nationalistic approach, outlines the importance of acknowledging the influence of American intermediaries. This period marked the height of Hollywood's success in China, however Chinese filmmakers were still not copying the Hollywood style thematically, choosing instead to draw upon their own traditions for inspiration and, despite their comparatively smaller budgets and out-dated technology, domestic films were able to compete (domestically) with Hollywood imports at this time (Ye, 2003). Another important factor, as noted by Ye (2003), is that at this point China and America were allies, which this was reflected in a 'sympathetic' attitude towards Chinese representation in Hollywood. Even Hye Seung Chung agrees that around this time there was 'marked a turning point in Hollywood's sinophobic representations', which he attributes to the popularisation of the Charlie Chan series in the 1930s (2006: 63). Interestingly 1927 was the year that the 'Don'ts and Be Carefuls' mandate, which would later become the Production Code in 1930, was introduced and set out guidelines for sensitive representations of foreign nations. However, 'the existence of the code and the pressure of foreign markets did not deter producers from recycling time-honoured Chinese stereotypes' (Chung, 2006: 89) and in the 1930s the Chinese government began its openly critical campaign against the representation of China in Hollywood films (Chung, 2006). However, Chung notes that the complicated and contradictory attitudes of the pre-war American public shuttled between 'yellowphilia (expressed through

philanthropy and paternalism for China) and yellowphobia (vexations and fears of miscegenation)' (2006: 60). Chung identifies the 'myth of the American protector', a paternalistic ideology promoted in American films during the Sino-Japanese War that cast American in 'the fatherly self-image of protector for the peace-loving, defenceless Chinese violated by belligerent Japanese imperialists' (2006: 64).

Before the war broke out, or more specifically, 'pre-Pearl Harbour' (Chung, 2006: 87) Hollywood films set in China were subject to censoring by the Production Code Administration, largely because of political sensitivity regarding the conflict between China and Japan (Cheung, 2006). However, after the attack at Pearl Harbour Hollywood became 'openly anti-Japanese and pro-Chinese' going so far as to regulate the 'political content of wartime Hollywood films, directly influencing representation of Asian allies and enemies' (Chung, 2006: 88). Sean Metzger draws attention to this complex representation using the example of the popular Chinese American actress Anna May Wong in Hollywood in the late 1930s who was, at the time, represented as a 'pro-consumer, pro-individualist...a cultural attaché' (Metzger, 2006: 4). Wong created, through her roles, 'a vision of China that was, at times, wholly consonant with the U.S. drive for capital gain and the racial inequities such a drive might entail, while simultaneously articulating a pattern of resistance to the hegemonic system that so often abused her.' (Metzger, 2006: 11).

The next key phase begins with the establishment of the PRC in 1949 and is characterised by Song Hwee Lim and Julian Ward (2011: 85) as the 'Forgotten Period'. Between the years 1949 to 1980, Hollywood and other foreign film products were banned from China (Ye, 2003; Latham, 2007; Ward, 2011). During this period of isolation from foreign influence the Chinese film industry was also strictly monitored and controlled by the Chinese state. Julian Ward (2011: 88) writes, 'the extraordinary level of interference by the organs of state at every stage of the filmmaking process and the limited artistic quality of the majority of the films from this period are undeniable'. Following the

breakout of the Korean War in 1950, strict cultural control prohibited American films from entering the country and penalised Chinese directors who favoured a Western style (Ye, 2003; Latham, 2006). During this time, film production in China 'imitated Soviet style production, turning out propaganda-driven films according to the state's production targets' (Zhu and Rosen, 2010: 1).

The end of the Maoist regime, therefore, marks the start of a new period of Hollywood-China relationship. This post-Mao period saw the reintroduction of foreign films, including Hollywood, into the Chinese market (Latham, 2007; Ye, 2003). After the end of the Cultural Revolution, to fill the cultural void, Hollywood films were welcomed back 'with exceptional enthusiasm' (Ye, 2003: 16). This period gave rise to the Fifth Generation of Chinese filmmakers who directly challenged the socialist realism filmmaking style and aesthetics of previous generations (Latham, 2007; Larson, 2011). Tan Ye suggests that at this time the Chinese film industry began systematically learning from Hollywood, making efforts to use 'Western film language either to enhance the narrative or to increase the complexity of characterisation' (Ye, 2003: 17). Fifth Generation filmmakers were also notably influenced by French New Wave cinema and other more experimental art-house auteurs (Latham, 2007) and this was a period of aesthetic experimentation (Larson, 2011). Sheldon H. Lu (1997) highlights the international acclaim awarded to Fifth Generation filmmakers such as Zhang Yimou as the impetus for a new transnational focus in Chinese cinema. Specifically, Lu (1997) signposts Zhang Yimou's win at the Berlin Film Festival as the turning point after which Chinese cinema took a decidedly more transnational and market-sensitive orientation. By the mid-1980s, however, the infallible regard that may have previously been attributed to Hollywood style was coming under increased scrutiny and a mixture of poorly made Hollywood films, an influx of content from other countries, a renewed faith in using their own heritage as inspiration, and post-colonial theory and nationalism led Chinese filmmakers to question and ultimately 'challenge the superpower of Hollywood' (Ye, 2003: 17). Ye (2003: 10) writes that, 'In the post-colonial era, Hollywood films have

often been treated by scholars on both sides of the Pacific as a form of cultural invasion; and the Chinese "Other," the reluctant victim of this invasion'.

According to existing literature the final phase in the Hollywood-China relationship and the contemporary period started in the late 80s or early 90s (depending on the author) and is usually considered the contemporary situation (Braester, 2011; Ye, 2003; Wang, 2013; Berry, M., 2013). However, these accounts rarely post-date 2012, which marks a more contemporary period. This period in the Hollywood-China relationship is characterised by China's dramatic economic growth (Ye, 2003), the globalisation of Chinese cinema and, more generally, China's integration into the global marketplace (Nakajima and Zhu, 2010) and increased scepticism regarding the influence and threat of Hollywood films, particularly as a result of the policy changes during this time that allowed revenue-sharing foreign films into China, and in the wake of significant box office successes of *Titanic* (1997) and *Avatar* (2009) (Zhang, 2007). Zhang Zhen (2007: 1) refers to the turn of the century as an 'Era of "Transformation" (*Zhuanxing*)' in Chinese cinema during which the influx of Hollywood films threatened the Chinese domestic cinema but simultaneously provided for 'a new spectatorship' (2007: 26) and an opportunity for virtual mobility. Tan Ye notes that the rivalry between Chinese and Hollywood films in the domestic market made Chinese filmmakers 'unwilling to acknowledge their learning from Hollywood', acknowledging Chinese influences rather than American (Ye, 2003: 18). The term 'Hollywoodism' has also been coined by Chinese critics and filmmakers and has negative connotations, mirroring a historical and mutual cultural and political culture clash between the two nations (Ye, 2003). Michael Berry (2006) highlights an important causal link between woefully out of date representations of China and a film's success, while noting that films that represent contemporary China do not fare well in international markets.

The issue of censorship is central to the relationship between China and Hollywood. The basis of Hollywood's governmental censorship was in its beginnings morally grounded

and was ultimately thwarted by a desire for creative freedom, which was replaced by a rating system to essentially allow in all content so long as viewer guidance is pre-stated (Wittern-Keller, 2013). According to Jon Lewis, thanks to an overwhelming approval rating amongst American parents, 'the ratings system is an unquestioned public relations success story' (2013: 42) and is so central to the system that it is now 'routinely considered in the development stage of a film product' (2013: 43). Censorship of Chinese films has been directly linked to the promotion of political messages in the country's on-going attempt to promote nation-building and, in the second half of the 20th century, socialist ideology (Xiao, 2013a). Xiao points out many differences between Chinese censorship and the Western equivalent, specifically its uncontested nature: its function 'is not limited to prohibition, but also includes projecting and promoting certain political agenda' (2013a: 126), its wording is 'purposely vague and ambiguous' (2013a: 127) so as to allow for interpretational power, and, crucially, it is used as a nationalistic tool, 'by functioning as a protection mechanism for the native film industry against Western film, especially Hollywood's economic domination, and as a line of defence against negative and derogatory cinematic representations of China in foreign films' (Xiao, 2013a: 127). This reflects not only the different principles around content regulation but also the fundamentally different ideas about the purpose of film. On the difference between the Chinese and U.S. censorship attitudes Aynne Kokas says 'the incongruity between China's and America's approaches to managing the media industries at the highest levels demonstrates the fundamental challenges in developing sustained industrial collaboration' (2017: 27).

The problem of piracy and the on-going pressures surrounding copyright have continually problematised the Hollywood-China relationship. S. D. Katz writes about the problem of bootlegging in 2004, 'In China, the piracy economy flourishes without menacing corporate rhetoric, legislative urgency, or apparent cultural guilt' (2004: 35), unlike the situation in the U.S. where the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act 'eliminates the presumption of innocence that characterises most of [the] judicial

system' (Katz, 2004: 36) and makes it a criminal act to bootleg copyrighted material. In Barbara Klinger's work she examines piracy as a powerful means of circulating films transnationally and uses the worldwide success of *Titanic* (1997) as an indicator of the impact of illegal distribution of Hollywood films on its global reception and notes that in China, piracy 'typically constitute[s] more than 90 per cent of the market' (Klinger, 2010: 111). Seagull Haiyan Song (2015) compares the copyright protection of films in France, Germany and the U.S. with China in terms of film authorship, ownership and remuneration scheme and proposes a hybrid model for China – reserving the Continental European concept of moral rights for individual authors, while vesting ownership of a film with the producer of a film, and at the same time, introducing a more balanced remuneration scheme for individual creators in a film. Philip E. Meza's (2007) work on how new technology is changing the future of Hollywood suggests that the only way to successfully combat piracy and copyright issues is for content and technology leaders to work together: to reduce the terms of copyright protection, to understand technology and to serve customer needs rather than penalising them.

In more recent years the Chinese government has placed increased 'requirements' on the content of Hollywood films, using spots on their coveted film-quota as bargaining power. The policy changes to the import-quota in 1994, 'required imported blockbusters to represent the state-of-the-art in global cultural achievement, and to display excellence in cinematic art and technique' (Nakajima & Zhu, 2010: 28) though these aspirations are not what they made them out to be, 'in practice, cultural achievement and artistic and technological excellence were apparently measured by a prospective film's budget, its star power, and/or its box office returns' (Nakajima & Zhu, 2010: 28-9) thus highlighting one of the key contradictions to the import rule - the conflict between ideology and economy, in which economics are the usual victor (Nakajima & Zhu, 2010). Meanwhile, the Chinese film industry has undergone a massive change alongside and in-keeping with the country's economic rise. Michael Berry (2006) explains that the huge influx of non-government sponsored enterprises has massively complicated and

changed the way in which Chinese films are financed, produced and distributed. Private companies began outperforming government enterprises; where state-run studios used to be the only type of studio it became normal for most directors to have their own production company (Berry, 2006). The increase in independent production and availability of DV technology, as well as the use of the internet as a distribution method, opened the doors for new, younger, independent filmmakers (Berry, 2006). Chinese production companies started forming co-productions, notably with Hollywood, and the development of a 'pan-Asian' filmmaking model was developed, based on the success of films such as *Hero (Yīngxióng)* (2002) which feature 'funding, production talent and actors from China, Taiwan, HK and overseas Chinese communities with the aim of using star power from each region to lock up the different local markets' (Berry, 2006: 27). In addition, issues concerning social change and the 'freedom' to talk about them provided inspiration for new stories (Berry, 2006). In short, China was gifted a combination of new stories and new tools. Berry says what we are left with is a David and Goliath situation, 'the David of low-to-no-cost independent DV production versus the Goliath of the bloated international pan-Asian blockbuster' (Berry, 2006: 27). And while Chinese filmmakers were still challenged by censorship and government-imposed barriers, China's Film Bureau began allowing more foreign films into the country than ever before, and sanctioned many previously banned materials, though notable taboo subjects were still in force (Berry, 2006).

S.D. Katz (2008) writes that relationships between China and the U.S. are formed as a result of their vested interests, but that co-production partnerships are complicated by differences in business style, with nepotism and a lack of transparency being common in China and with the on-going problem of policy opacity and regulation changes. Stanley Rosen (2010) suggests that China's best chance to compete with Hollywood is to join forces in co-productions and others agree that joint ventures are key to the successful future of both nations film industries (Berry, 2006; Katz, 2008; Curtin, 2007; Wang 2012).

Despite the mutually beneficial potential outcomes there is still resistance on both sides.

Yiman Wang writes,

From the Chinese perspective, Hollywood's current crusade into China is a double-edged sword. It may open up a new vista for Chinese cinema. Yet, like Hollywood's incursion into China in the early twentieth century, the current crusade also threatens to erase the identity of Chinese cinema and compromise Chinese self-esteem (2012: 145).

Legendary's China strategy reveals the complex competing and compromising nature of Sino-Hollywood relations and illustrates China's influence on Hollywood products in recent years, simultaneously demonstrating the complicated nature of cinema's role as an instrument of soft power and a communicator of national identity.

Cinema as soft power and conveyor of national identity

The concept of national identity - for these purposes Chinese and North American national identities - is paramount to this thesis not only to establish how the national identity of each side is manifested and/or promoted within film texts (in the form of self-promotion as well as, as a tool for catering to the other) but also to establish how Sino-U.S "transnational products", or co-productions, navigate, combine or reject one side or the other in practice and product. It is important for the purposes of this research to distinguish between national identity, nationalism and patriotism, because they each feature in the discussion, for different reasons and to different ends. Although the definitions of patriotism are varied, it is generally understood to mean a sense of loyalty to a nation and a belief that a particular country is superior (Hurwitz and Peffley, 1999) while nationalism is considered to take this ideology further by promoting the interests of a specific nation above others, as well as a belief in self-governance (Smith, 2010). To this end, nationalism is indelibly linked with politics, where patriotism is not necessarily political. Both nationalism and patriotism share the characteristic of promoting a nation,

however, national identity is not necessarily a promotion. This thesis takes the definition put forward by Huddy and Khatib (2007) who use a social identity approach to establish a theoretically grounded measure of national identity. The authors define national identity as a sense of belonging to a nation that is internalised and subjective, and as a form of social identity (Huddy and Khatib, 2007). In Benedict Anderson's (1983) work on national identity as imagined communities, he foregrounds the social processes involved in a person's identification with a broader national community. A central theme in Anderson's (1983) work is the role of the media in the conceptualisation of their audience as representatives of the nation state and the role of the media in constructions of nationalism or notions of national identity. The founding principles of the U.S. constitution foreground the centrality of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," a directive whose ambiguity has allowed for continued and endless re-interpretation. In Daniel P. Franklin's (2006: 21) work on the political culture of film in the U.S., Franklin describes the U.S. political culture as classical liberalism, which as an ideology, involves a capitalist economic system wherein 'the values of ideas, people, and products are determined by the preferences of consumers'. This 'individualism, as opposed to communalism' (Franklin, 2006: 23) is antithetical to the Chinese system of socialist communism. Franklin (and others) note that Hollywood is guided by capitalism and market tastes far more than by politics. Indeed, Franklin (2006) notes that politics is often avoided in Hollywood films so as to avoid the risk of alienating the audience.

One of the key issues at hand in this thesis is the question of how Hollywood films and Sino-U.S. co-productions conceptualise their audience and construct and promote national identity. In the late 1980s, following the Maoist era of exclusively ideologically-grounded official productions, the Chinese market re-introduced commercially-oriented genre films. In 1987, in response to the growing popularity of such genre films in China, the term "main-melody" (*zhuxuanlu*) was established in an attempt to 'formalise and consolidate government-supported filmmaking with specific ideological content' (Wolte, 2018). The term was coined to 'update' propaganda films so as to 'increase

audience appeal while maintaining socialist messages' (Davis, 2014), but as Isabel Wolte (2018: 34) points out, there is a difference between propaganda and 'persuasive communication' and while the former 'generally neglects the wishes of the audience and imposes its message', the latter 'cleverly takes advantage of the audiences conscious and subconscious desires'. Wolte (2018: 32) uses the example of the 2009 film *The Founding of a Republic*, which broke Chinese box office records, as an example of the idea that 'films about Chinese revolutionary history continue to be used as a means to establish a collective national and political identity based on a malleable view of history'.

In Kevin Latham's (2007: 61) work on pop culture in China, he notes that there is a 'strong tendency in analyses of China, and Chinese media in particular, to overemphasise their political, resistive, or critical qualities when the vast majority of popular media production and consumption is for most people apolitical'. In Savio Chan and Michael Zakkour's (2014: 14) work on Chinese "super consumers," they note that 'Western firms that overfocus on the country's twentieth century political history - that see the behaviours of Chinese people as a response to or backlash against communism - are missing the bigger picture'. Furthermore, far from being a newly emergent superpower, the authors suggest that China has been a 'major world power and economic superpower several times in its long history' and that 'China knows itself and will embrace whatever the West brings' (Chan and Zakkour, 2014: 14). China's recent perceived rise to power is better understood in the wider discussion of Chinese modernism in the era of reforms starting in the 1980s. It is first important to note that Chinese modernism does not follow in the same historical time period as Euro-American modernism. Sheldon H. Lu (2001: 69) notes that,

modernity cannot be built on some absolute, fixed, unilinear model from the West. Modernity is an uneven process subject to spatial-temporal fluctuations and cross-cultural differences. That China has a "time lag" in relation to the West means that modernisation in the Chinese

experience must have its own unique mechanisms and characteristics.

Xudong Zhang (1997: 18) suggests that Chinese modernism must be 'seen as shaped by the concrete socioeconomic, political, as well as cultural conditions that produced the Chinese problematic itself'. Following Mao's death and the end of the Cultural Revolution, cultural and intellectual debate resurfaced in the "Great Cultural Discussion" or the so-called Cultural Fever, when, according to Xudong Zhang (1997: 4) 'perhaps for the first time in the history of the People's Republic, political-intellectual discussion was allowed discursive room outside the state apparatus of ideology'. Zhang's (1997) work explores the work of the Fifth Generation movement in China, which came into being in 1984, radically redefining filmmaking visually as well as politically. Zhang (1997: 9) notes that the New Era - the decade of the 1980s, which was also referred to as the "reforms decade" - is 'thus an essential political intervention of Deng [Xiaoping]'s China', designed to make the discontinuity from the Maoist age 'clear while leaving ambiguous room for continuity with the socialist past'. In the following decade, the 1990s, the "sixth generation" or the "underground" movement, was a period categorised by a rise in "illegitimate" independent filmmaking. Independent filmmaking in the Chinese context cannot be equated with the American model of independent cinema as highlighted by Chris Berry (2006: 109) who notes that the American model is 'grounded in an understanding of independence as freedom from power rather than something produced by power'. Berry (2006: 119) establishes that independent cinema in the Chinese context 'was never a dissent culture, and it is becoming less and less similar to one as marketisation and globalisation proceed apace'.

Ian Christie (2013) poses the issue of national cinema as a conundrum that sits problematically among film history, post-structural theory, and the operations of contemporary media policy. Hollywood films are often said to be used as tools to promote Western (American) culture and values, as noted by Michael Curtin (2010). According to Curtin the U.S. has 'long appreciated Hollywood's role as cultural

ambassador' and that U.S. film and television programmes and their 'free-flow' information policies are all 'seen as part of a broad American cultural agenda' (2010: 118). Curtin (2010) argues that China's 'current' rise in significance as a market necessitates the consideration of the effect on audiences, artists, markets and finance in a similar way.

Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden problematise any attempt to assign a fixed national identity to any nation's cinema, 'the global circulation of money, commodities, information, and human beings is giving rise to films whose aesthetic and narrative dynamics, and even the modes of emotional identification they elicit, reflect the impact of advanced capitalism and new media technologies as components of an increasingly interconnected world-system' (2006: 1). While in the same work Andrew Higson writes, it is 'inappropriate to assume that cinema and film culture are bound by the limits of the nation state' given 'the complexities of the international film industry and the transnational movements of finance capital, film-makers and films' (2006: 23)

Part of the reason that the characterisation of contemporary Chinese national identity in the context of China's "rise" as a political and economic superpower, and the pervasion of U.S. control over the film industry and market, is inherently inextricable from politics, is the role of cinema as a conveyor soft power. Soft power, a term introduced by Joseph Nye in an article in 1994 and consolidated in his book on the subject a decade later (Nye, 2004), refers to the type of influential power that is intangible as opposed to the tangible (hard) power such as the military and economic forces. Nye (2004: 5) explains that this soft power - 'getting others to want the outcomes that you want -co-opts people rather than coerces them'.

Nye (2004) notes with direct reference to Hollywood (as part of American popular culture) as purveyor of soft power, that it is not a question of one size fits all. Indeed, what one audience may find attractive or compelling, another may reject for the same reasons (Nye, 2004). With specific regard to China, Nye notes, 'In China, the attraction

and rejection of American culture among different groups may cancel each other out' (2004: 13). In recent years, much scholarly attention has been paid to the role of soft power in China's rise (Ding, 2008; Monroe, 2010; Li, 2009; Chua, 2012; Barr, 2011).

Darrell William Davis (2014: 191-192) notes that 'the soft power of the film marketplace might be turned to the needs of marketisation, the better to represent China to the world, in charismatic terms, on a global scale'. With reference to the paradoxes of marketisation in China's film industry, Davis (2014) suggests that 'marketisation's productive power boosts Party power and state power, and the Party seeks to both ride and guide the power of the market'. In her work on *China's Encounter with Global Hollywood*, Wendy Su (2016) describes the rise of China, legitimised by its socialist market economy, as treating global capital as a source of power. In addition, she writes that China 'has transformed its cultural sector from one that emphasises public service and ideological control to one that focuses on profit-seeking cultural industries that cater to market demands' (2016, 6). Su argues that 'the Chinese government has effectively consolidated its authoritarian power through both an alliance and a tug of war with global capital and through the advancement of the film-inclusive cultural industries' (2016: 7). Su notes that, in China, Hollywood is perceived as a 'total cultural package' rather than as a collection of individual products (2016: 45) intrinsically associated with cultural imperialism or cultural homogenisation. Su (2016) identifies the ways in which this fragmentation is reflected in the divisive opinions about the effect of Hollywood films on the Chinese domestic industry, with some welcoming their influence as healthy competition, while others see it as a behemoth that frequently eclipses domestic films and creates unrealistic expectations on the comparatively underdeveloped domestic industry. The Chinese government were concerned about increasing the quota on foreign imported films because of the perceived negative effect it would have on the Chinese domestic box office, anticipating Hollywood would earn substantially more of the revenue than under the then-current revenue sharing arrangement, which would in turn negatively affect the development of Chinese domestic cinema (Su, 2016). However, nationalistic Chinese domestic films continue to

draw audiences. Chris Berry (2018) highlights the phenomenal success of *Wolf Warrior 2* (*Zhàn Láng 2*) (2017) as marking, 'a new stage in Chinese cinema in the context of the global revival of nationalism. In *Wolf Warrior 2*, China moves beyond isolation from the West, beyond an accommodation with the West, into open hostility toward the West and contestation'. In this sense, this growing trend - which is revealed in the case study of *The Great Wall* (2016) in chapters three and four - can be viewed as a direct counter to the previous hegemonic role of Hollywood as cultural negotiator.

In their edited work on transnational cinema Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden (2006: 1) highlight the problematisation of national cinema as a category due to the 'increasing permeability of national borders' as a result of accelerated flows of global capital, shifting geopolitical climates, new technologies (such as new digital media) and heightened access to these new technologies 'for both filmmakers and spectators'. This phenomenon is at the heart of the contemporary relationship between China and Hollywood and it underpins this entire thesis. Ezra and Rowden (2006: 2) position Hollywood as central to the transnationalization of cinema, noting that it has, 'both influenced and been influenced by the flows of cultural exchange that are transforming the ways people the world over are making and watching films'. The authors note that Hollywood has 'systematically dominated all other film cultures and modes of cinematic imagery, production, and reception' (Ezra and Rowden, 2006: 2). Higbee and Lim (2010: 9) outline three key approaches to the conceptualisation of the transnational in relation to film studies; the first focuses on the national/transnational binary, the second 'privileges an analysis of the transnational as a regional phenomenon by examining film cultures/national cinemas which invest in a shared cultural heritage and/or geo-political boundary', and the third 'relates to work on diasporic, exilic and postcolonial cinemas' through analysis of the representation of cultural identity and by challenging the western, Eurocentricity of cinema's ideological, aesthetic and narrative norms. However, as the authors argue, in these cases the term 'transnational' is taken 'as shorthand for an international or supranational mode of film production whose impact

and reach lies beyond the bounds of the national' (Higbee and Lim, 2010: 9). Higbee and Lim (2010: 10) note that this is particularly problematic because it suggests that the national does not exist within the transnational. Moreover, the authors argue that the term is often used to describe international co-productions or global workforce collaborations irrespective of 'aesthetic, political or economic implications of such transnational collaboration might mean – employing a difference that, we might say, makes no difference at all' (Higbee and Lim, 2010: 10). The authors suggest that 'the concept of 'transnational cinema' cannot be merely descriptive because all border-crossing activities are necessarily fraught with issues of power; neither can it be purely prescriptive as this often amounts to nothing more than wishful thinking' arguing instead for a 'critical transnationalism' approach that 'interrogates how these filmmaking activities negotiate with the national on all levels – from cultural policy to financial sources, from the multiculturalism of difference to how it reconfigures the nation's image of itself' (Higbee and Lim, 2010: 10). Higbee and Lim provide a useful framework for my own research into the transnational dimensions of the Hollywood-China relationship, foregrounding the analysis of the negotiation of the national as a consequence or as a process of the transnational.

In Chris Berry's (2010) work on transnational cinema he uses the 'Chinese situation' as a case study by which to further define and research transnational cinema. Berry (2010: 112) points out that 'no transnational cinema exists without encountering and negotiating national spaces and cultures', thus bringing us back to the idea of the negotiation of the national. Furthermore Berry (2010: 113) makes the argument that in order to understand the transnational, it is necessary to engage in the national, which in the context of case studies should be 'grounded in the awareness that all knowledge comes out of and is shaped by a dialectical relationship with particular places, times and conditions of their production'.

The idea of transnational cinema and its subsidiaries (particularly transnational storytelling and transnational visuality) are of particular importance to my research precisely because one of the fundamental tasks of this research is to analyse the exportation of Hollywood products and - by extension - North American culture and values - into China. The definition of transnationalism within the field of cinema studies is the subject of much debate (e.g. Higbee and Lim, 2010; Berry, 2010). Most notably, the term is often used as synonymous with concepts such as globalisation, world cinema, and co-productions or collaborations between two (or more) countries (Higbee and Lim, 2010). In Chris Berry's (2010) work on transnationalism from the Chinese perspective, he defines transnationalism in the context of film studies as a 'larger structural shift in the world order away from the old order of nation states.' Berry (2010) labels the 'old order' as the 'international order', wherein 'the nation-state understood to have complete sovereignty over the territory that it rules, and the world order is organised as transactions of various kinds between and regulated by these states'. In what Berry (2010: 120) describes as the 'transnational order', 'the nation state does not disappear' but instead 'a new order emerges in which citizens and - at least as important - corporations have greater relative autonomy from the state in regard to the economy at least and can operate economically across state borders'. One of the key attributes of the transnational order is that it operates according to principles of profit maximisation and post-Fordist flexible manufacturing. Berry (2010: 124) concludes that 'any proper consideration of this transnational order must not only take into account the economic forces of global capital in cinema, but also by understanding that the spaces opened up in the course of accommodating those forces have also allowed a host of other cinematic activities to develop and thrive'. Anna Tsing's (2000) work seeks to create a helpful distinction between the difference between the globalisation ideology and the transnational as practice by suggesting that globalisation refers to an overarching ideology whereas transnational refers to 'transborder projects' which, while operating within the globalised ideology, do not necessarily promote it. Berry (2010: 123) builds upon Tsing's (2000) work by indicating that transborder production practice does not

follow an even flow across the globe, but rather ‘flow occurs in particular channels, in particular directions and in particular ways.’ Furthermore, Berry (2010: 123) notes that ‘the multitude of transnational projects constituting these transborder cinema practices cannot all be reduced to and accounted for wholly in terms of the logic of the market, its so-called ‘imperatives’, and the even larger forces such as cultural affinity that shape it in certain ways’. This is particularly important for this thesis because its central aim is to identify and analyse precisely these “transborder projects” as well as the directional flow of capital, commodities and culture between China and Hollywood. Yingjin Zhang proposes ‘polylocality’ as a new conceptual framework for investigating the shifting spaces of contemporary Chinese cinema in the age of globalisation and calls for comparative studies of underdeveloped areas beyond the imperative of transnationalism (Zhang, 2009). Zhang addresses theories and practices related to space, place, and polylocality in contemporary China and urges scholars to move beyond the current paradigm and explore transnational and comparative film studies (Zhang, 2009).

Sheldon H. Lu’s (1997) seminal edited work, *Transnational Chinese Cinemas*, raises the problematic idea of Chinese cinema in light of the developments of commercialisation, commodification and internationalisation. Lu (1997: 10) writes that what some perceive to be the ‘global homogenisation of cultural production’ had led to a ‘commodification of Chinese film to an unprecedented degree’, while commercialisation has forced filmmakers, artists and writers to ‘operate according to the principles of a market economy and consumerism’ (1997: 11). Lu (1997: 11) notes that the internationalisation inherent to the transnational production and distribution of Chinese films ‘is a way to both evade and to defy the internal domination of the regime. Here, indigenous cultural critique and global capital seem to merge in this transnational process’. Lu (1997) is hinting towards the intersection that will become a central focus of this thesis.

The question of the Hollywood-China intersection is taken up by Michael Berry (2013) in his examination of *The Karate Kid* (2010). Specifically, Berry (2013: 170-171) asks ‘how do these types of complex transnational productions challenge our traditional conception of a Chinese national cinema? And what are the ideological and aesthetic ramifications when a film like *The Karate Kid* comes to be regarded as an example of “Chinese Cinema”?’ Berry notes that this type of Hollywood-China is part of a trend of “Hollywoodization” of Chinese cinema, but that this is only half the story - the other half being the impact of Chinese cinema on Hollywood, both signifying ‘the merging of two distinct trends that have been playing out in different regions over the course of decades’ (2013: 171). Berry (2013: 174) like many others (Klein, 2004; Crothers Dilley, 2015; Wu and Chan, 2007; Yang, 2014) credits *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) as establishing a model for transnational production and for becoming China’s first event film.

The unprecedented success of *Crouching Tiger* highlighted the market for Chinese event films and paved the way for a Chinese blockbuster model. Berry (2013: 174) credits Zhang Yimou’s *Hero* (*Yīngxióng*) (2002) as the ‘first PRC production to appropriate the blockbuster model’ by its pan-Chinese casting and its significant advertising campaign. The Chinese coined the term *dapian*, initially to refer to high concept Hollywood films that made their way back into China in the 1990s, but later used as an update to the term main-melody, in this case Chinese films that used a Hollywood style of high concept filmmaking used to promote Chinese socialism (Davis, 2014). Darrell William Davis (2014: 203) notes that, following *Hero*, ‘the *dapian* blueprint appeared: impressive juggernauts made to carry prosocialist themes’ (in the case of *Hero*, the ‘one-China message’). *Dapian* films, then, exemplify the influence of Hollywood in China and, simultaneously, the co-opting of Chinese cinema by Chinese politics.

Conclusion

The purpose of this review was four-fold: to outline the periodisation of Hollywood, to examine Hollywood's global character, to chart and assess the history of the relationship between China and Hollywood, and to consider the role of cinema as an instrument of soft power and as a conveyer of national identity. It is clear from the literature reviewed on Hollywood periodisation that Hollywood has undergone change periodically throughout its history, and those machinations are well documented. Similarly, much has been written on Hollywood's global focus and the ways in which Hollywood has adapted and strategized to create an increasingly global product. The pre-2012 relationship between Hollywood and China is well accounted for in academic research. Less explored is the most contemporary Hollywood-China (post-2012) relationship. There does exist a great deal of scholarship on the use of cinema as a communicator of national identity, and of the use of the medium as soft power, all of which is further tested and reconfigured by the scholarly attention paid to transnational cinema. This thesis ties together these four key strands to provide an account of the contemporary relationship between the Chinese and Hollywood film industries, taking into account the techniques used by Hollywood to enter and entertain the Chinese market, specifically, and how the complexities of incompatible cultural identities and industrial standards problematise this nexus of transnational cinema. Furthermore, the case study at the centre of this research - Legendary Entertainment - demonstrates a "post-post-classical" period in Hollywood history.

Methodological Approach

This thesis is underpinned by critical conceptual frameworks of globalisation, transnationalism, geopolitics and political economy and utilises approaches drawn from economic industrial analysis and critical media industry studies. In her work on international media studies, Divya C. McMillin situates the discipline within the international context of the networked, globalised 21st century and critiques the field. McMillin (2007) highlights critical theories such as world system theory and dependency theory, as well as cultural and media imperialism, but raises the issue that these theories continue to focus on the structure of power within the media and not media reception and analysis. McMillin suggests that a lack of attention to media studies in tri continent countries, particularly rituals of consumption, that might otherwise change our understanding of 'global, national, and local media production, flow and consumption' (2007: 15). In doing so McMillin (2007) highlights the U.S.-centricity inherent to global media studies.

In order to avoid an overt U.S. bias I draw upon the cultural globalisation theory to analyse the cultural transmission of ideas and the industrial process of interaction and integration. Tanner Mirrlees (2013), in his work on global entertainment media, analyses the ownership, production, distribution, marketing, exhibition and consumption of global films and television shows using political economy and cultural studies). In doing so Mirrlees (2013) dissects the theories of cultural imperialism and cultural globalisation and paves the way for future research, such as my own. The cultural imperialism paradigm claims that 'the U.S. dominates culture as it does economy, military, and technical growth' (Mirrlees, 2013: 25), that this 'audio-visual trade' is outward flowing and non-reciprocal, relies on capitalism, universalisation, the free-flow of information and ultimately has a negative effect on international audiences (Mirrlees, 2013). The claims of the cultural globalisation paradigm state that the 'age of empires and

imperialism is over and that the world system is fundamentally different than before' (Mirrlees, 2013: 45) and that this new terrain is one of international interdependence, of multiple, multiplying media centres in a state of flux, culturally autonomous, non-U.S.-centric, formed of active participants in all parts of the world and challenges strict notions of nationalism as territorially based (Mirrlees, 2013). Kenneth Thompson argues that 'contrary to the claims of the cultural imperialism thesis, globalisation is unlikely to produce an entirely regulated, homogenised global culture', though he points out this does not 'deny the drive of global capitalism' (1997: 148). Mirrlees points out that capitalist logic shapes the existence of entertainment media, highlighting as a result the unique characteristics of entertainment media commodities backing up his claim that 'Hollywood films are genuinely 'global' films' by pointing out that Hollywood films often eclipse domestic films in their native markets (2013: 92).

Critical political economy is concerned with explaining the economic dynamics of production and how this promotes certain cultural forms over others (Golding & Murdock, 2000). Golding and Murdock highlight the complexities of this notion in relation to international television co-productions, explaining,

Take for example the increasing reliance on international co-production agreements in television drama production. These arrangements impose a variety of constraints on form as the partners search for subject matter and narrative styles that they can sell in their home markets. The resulting bargain may produce an Americanised product which is fast moving, based on simple characterisations, works with a tried and tested action format and offers an unambiguous ending. Or it may result in a variant of the 'televisual tourism', which trades on the familiar forms and sites of the national cultural heritage (Golding and Murdock, 2000: 75)

My analysis of the quest for the Sino-Hollywood co-production seeks precisely to examine this increased reliance on co-productions in the film industry.

I employ a geopolitical framework to analyse the relationship between production, funding, and distribution, and the law, customs, and government policies that shape the film industry infrastructure. Kimberley Coulter suggests that studies of film in critical geopolitics tend to focus on studying the finished film products,

Many focus on cinematic constructions of the geopolitical and may illustrate the inherent spatiality of edited moving images and the effect of mobility on signification and perspectives. Other studies are concerned with how these representations affect viewers, affirming narratives of group belonging, or, in the case of critically oriented films – expanding generosity and capacity for judgment. (Coulter, 2011: 950)

Furthermore, Coulter (2011: 949) argues that ‘Political and economic conditions have always affected what stories it is feasible – or profitable – for filmmakers to tell, but as films cross more borders, these conditions become more territorially interdependent’. Coulter suggests that studying the ‘territorial appeals’ of films benefits a critical geopolitical study. Moreover, Coulter (2011: 950) suggests that, ‘Most importantly, work in critical geopolitics and geography on film, through attention to the social construction of space, remind us of the “soft” power of supposedly “banal” media at work in everyday lives’. This analysis of the “territorial” and the role that cinema plays in asserting soft power is of central concern to this thesis.

Media industry studies approaches enable the application of integrated analyses of media texts, audiences, histories and cultures. I draw, in particular, on Douglas Gomery’s (2005: 3) work on the history of the Hollywood studios, in which he applies what he terms ‘Industrial Analysis’,

I start by first asking who owned, controlled and operated the corporations. With that established, I then analyse the corporations’ economic conduct. How did they choose how many films to produce? How did they distribute them around the world? What means did they use to present films to the public, at what price and in what order?

I also draw on Thomas Schatz's 'film industry studies' (2009b: 45), which sits within critical media industry studies, in which he suggests that the key concerns of a film industry studies approach are questions of film style, authorship, and mode of production. Schatz (2009b: 46) explains,

Film style encompasses the narrative, technical, and formal-aesthetic norms that prevail at any given moment (or period) in industry history, the ways in which those norms are evident in specific films, and what constitutes stylistic innovation. Authorship and mode of production are related aspects of the overall filmmaking process, with authorship best understood in terms of the creation of individual films while mode of production considers the "machinery" of the film industry from top to bottom.

These approaches combined set out a framework for my analysis of the Hollywood and Chinese industries and the relationship between the two.

Combining these approaches allows me to explore how the power of media industries shape cultural agendas in local, trans/national, and global contexts, as well as the aesthetic, cultural, economic and social values associated with the U.S. and Chinese film industries. My research material uses a mixed methods approach by combining qualitative and quantitative research. I use trade press articles and journals (such as *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety*) for industrial commentary on co-production partnerships, financial reporting and changes to policy and business models. I use online access to the trade press, as well as mainstream media and other industry websites for contemporaneous insights into the co--production partnerships, trade relations and business models. The internet offers instantaneous access to the latest industry stories, breaking news and industrial insights. Unlike peer-reviewed scholarship, there is almost no delay between event and publication. However, there is an industrial discursive mode inherent in the trade press that must be considered with criticality; it is not and cannot be "neutral news".

Studio micro-histories and industrial analysis

Research on individual film studios is an important area of film studies because they capture and illustrate industrial trends. In Douglas Gomery's work on *The Hollywood Studio System* (2005) he provides a book-length analysis of the origins of the Hollywood film studios began and how they operated throughout the twentieth century. Gomery's work presented a valuable example which my own research followed. Yannis Tzioumakis (2012) compiles a collection of independent studio histories in his work, *Hollywood's Indies*. He adopts a similar methodological approach to Alisa Perren in her work on Miramax (Perren, 2012), drawing on trade and industry publications, mainstream press, economics magazines, studio publicity material, including press releases, and interviews with industry personnel. This provided an influence for my own methodological choices. Claire Molloy (2010) outlines a history of Newmarket Capital Group through a detailed insight into the founders, and a thorough investigation of the financial investments that formed the studios capital. Molloy (2010) traces the flow of finance: how individual films were financed by the studio, the box office yields of those films, how increased capita opened up opportunities, particularly in terms of slate deals, agreements with other companies and ultimately Newmarket's diversification and expansion as a company. Importantly, Molloy (2010) situates Newmarket within the wider economic and political context. In Tino Balio's work on United Artists (2009a; 2009b) he seeks to uncover the entrepreneurial aspect of the company. In the first of two volumes Balio asserts United Artists (UA) as a unique Hollywood company not only because it never 'operated a studio' but also because it was founded by the film stars of the era themselves (Balio, 2009a). Balio writes, 'In writing this history of the company, I wanted to know how the founders functioned in the boardroom. Much had been written about them as filmmakers, but little was known about them as entrepreneurs' (2009a: xvii). Balio (2009a) begins by critiquing UA's original organisation plan and uses that to explain how it was different from standard industry practice. He then describes UA's style of independent production and outlines the method by which it joined the industry

establishment (Balio, 2009a). This approach provided a clear template for me to ascertain how Legendary came into being. The second volume of Balio's (2009b) work on United Artists focuses on the evolution of the company after a change of ownership and follows a different approach to the first. This time Balio intends to analyse the structure and operations of the company using industrial organisation and business administration techniques to 'mak[e] sense out of a period of film industry history that underwent radical transformation as a result of changing audience tastes, federal antitrust action, competition from television, and conglomerate takeovers' (2009b: xv). Like Legendary, UA at this time 'survived three forms of corporate ownership— private company, publicly held corporation, and conglomerate subsidiary. Thus, UA makes an ideal example of a modern, that is, post-1950, motion picture company' (Balio, 2009: xvi). Balio describes the barriers to entering the industry, the effect of the economic climate, the impact of positive and negative press and perceived reputation, access to finance and production profits (2009b). These areas of focus were useful signposts for my own investigation of Legendary. Much of the second volume of Balio's (2009b) work focuses on United Artists' business tactics and management style; their contractual agreements with producers, directors and stars and their management of production costs. He also spends time outlining and analysing their output, their marketing and distribution techniques and their position within a global context (Balio, 2009b). Balio describes his research as being 'based on corporate records of UA and on interviews with Arthur Krim and other company executives. Consisting of correspondence, letters of agreement, contracts, annual reports, legal files, and other materials' (2009b: 8) and as such is very much in line with Tzioumakis (2012) and Perren (2012) and my own research methodology.

Data Collection

Taking inspiration from the work of Tzioumakis (2012), Perren (2012) and Balio (2009), I conducted an extensive review of the trade press that allowed me to examine information being released by co--production companies and industry officials. While documents such as these are easily accessible and informative, I was mindful that they also pose a question of reliability since they are based on PR from the companies they are covering.

In November 2017 I visited Los Angeles and spent a week undertaking archival research in the Margaret Herrick Library. According to Marc Ventresca and John Mohr (2017: 805) archival research methods, broadly speaking, involve 'the study of historical documents.' My own archival research followed a historiographic approach. Ventresca and Mohr (2017: 807) explain that, 'the distinctive character of the historiographic tradition was its attention to the rich details of organisational life, rendering what were essentially ethnographic studies of organisations that were conducted through the medium of archival material'. At the Margaret Herrick archives I conducted searches on Legendary Entertainment and some of the key films that I focus on in all four chapters. The archive gave me access to an extensive collection of trade press articles, production documents and press releases on Legendary's financial backers, personnel structure, and film output. This detailed information enabled me to construct a timeline for the studio that follows an industrial analysis methodology as outlined in Douglas Gomery's work on the Hollywood studio system.

I identified potential interviewees through purposive sampling and conducted first-person semi-structured interviews with industry personnel to ascertain their experiences of working with and for Legendary Entertainment and/or with Chinese partners. First-person interviews are a developing area of research methodology and this provided my own research with an essential qualitative component. Using interviews provided a first-hand and contemporaneous insight into the state of affairs within the industry. Bonnie Brennen (2017: 28) notes, 'Simply stated, an interview is a

focused, purposeful conversation between two or more people'. Structured interviews use a specific, standardised formula that 'includes pre-established questions that encourage a limited range of response and are open to a minimum of interpretation' (Brennen, 2017: 29). Semi-structured interviews are also based on a set of pre-existing questions, but they offer greater flexibility; 'interviewers may vary the order of questions and may also ask follow up questions to delve more deeply into some of the topics or issues addressed, or to clarify answers given by the respondent' (Brennen, 2017: 29) I used a semi-structured interview format.

While in Los Angeles I attended the 2017 U.S.-China Film Summit where I was able to network with industry personnel, many of whom expressed a positive interest in being involved in my research. As well as taking advantage of this unique networking opportunity I was also able to listen to panellists talking about their experiences of working with Chinese and U.S. partners, which gave me a valuable insight into the working relationships as they exist in the current climate. The data I gathered from the Margaret Herrick archives and the U.S.-China Film Summit allowed me to construct a detailed understanding of the Legendary timeline and the contemporaneous relationship between China and Hollywood, which in turn enabled me to construct questions for my interviewees. I identified research participants from a deliberately targeted sample of key industry personnel including company CEOs, industry analysts, filmmakers and production personnel. These are the individuals who have first-hand experience of the developing relationship between China and Hollywood with respect to film funding, distribution and production. Since all the interview subjects were based in the U.S. or China, I conducted the interviews over the phone or using Skype, a method endorsed by methodology experts such as Bonnie Brennan (2017). With respect to the use of the interviews, I follow the approach taken by Sherry Ortner (2013). In Ortner's (2013: 26) work on the relationship between Hollywood, independent film and American society, she interviews 'people in various positions within the media industry in general and independent film in particular.' Ortner uses these interviews in two key

ways. Firstly, ‘people tell stories about their own experiences’; a collection of accounts that, when pieced together, ‘provide a kind of insiders’ oral history’ (Ortner, 2013: 26). Secondly, Ortner (2013: 27) treats the interviews - as well as public and published interviews - ‘as texts to be taken apart in order to understand the language, the discourse, and the modes of self-expression of the world of independent film.’ This, Ortner suggests (2013: 27) ‘represents another way to get “inside” a cultural world, through the interpretation of social and cultural texts broadly conceived, in this case texts of ordinary talk and conversation.’ Ortner (2013: 27) explains that she treats ‘the interviews and field notes as texts in this sense and mine them for the distinctive expressions and tropes that seem to open up independent film people’s distinctive ways of thinking about their work and their world.’ This is precisely what I have aimed to do in my own research; for my purposes to establish how Hollywood personnel think about co-productions with China.

As part of my primary research I interviewed ten individuals who work with or in the Hollywood industry, who have worked with Chinese partners or collaborators: Peter Loehr, a film producer with extensive experience in the Chinese film industry, producer of *The Great Wall* (2016) and former CEO of Legendary East; Jillian Share, former senior vice president of creative at Legendary and executive producer of *The Great Wall*; E. Bennett Walsh, executive producer of *The Great Wall*; Eric Hedayat, co-producer of *The Great Wall*; Adam Wheatley the art director on *The Great Wall*; Chris Bremble, founder and CEO of Base FX who was one of the visual effects vendors on *The Great Wall*; Graham Stumpf, post-production supervisor on *The Great Wall*; Joseph Liao, former vice president of marketing at Legendary Entertainment; Lindsay Conner, partner at Manatt Entertainment and head of the film, television and digital content practice, having facilitated co-finance and distribution deals between China and Hollywood companies; Jonathan Landreth, former Asia Editor for *Variety*, founding editor of China Film Insider; and a High Ranking Industry Person who requested anonymisation. For this type of industrial research, it was essential that I be able to position the interviewees in the

context of the industry, which is why in all but one case the interviewees are not anonymised.

In addition to the interview, the trade press analysis and archival research I also undertook textual and paratextual analysis of *The Great Wall* (2016) in order to establish and interrogate the film's meaning and its historical, industrial, and cultural significance. Textual analysis enables a multi-layered understanding of a film, offering insight into the likely intended reading of the film and into the likely interpretations by audiences. There are many textual analysis methodologies and for the purposes of this research I used the post-structuralist approach defined by Allan McKee (2003) as a form of cultural relativism that acknowledges how our individual cultures impact our experience of reality. I also draw on paratextual analysis in my examination of *The Great Wall*. According to Gérard Genette (1997: 1), paratexts are 'accompanying productions' to a text, which surround a text, helping to present it and to make sense of it. Paratexts exist on the threshold of a text, rather than as a boundary, as a space 'between text and off text' (Genette, 1997: 2). The accompanying products that exist within this threshold are, according to Genette, 'always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimised by the author' and offer a site of transition and *transaction*; a 'privileged place of pragmatics and strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that...is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading for it' (1997: 2). I analyse *The Great Wall's* trailer, teaser, film posters and Blu Ray extra features in order to further interrogate the film's meanings according to their author and their audience.

Limitations

As with any research project there are certain limitations that I have had to work around. Access to Hollywood personnel is notoriously difficult to obtain (Ortner, 2013). I was

able to secure the requisite number of interviewees, but I had to be extremely flexible in terms of how much time they could give me and the manner in which we spoke. That is to say, the ideal situation was to speak with them via a video link. In reality, I was only able to speak with one of the eleven interviewees that way, and all of the others spoke to me by phone. Perhaps the most significant limitation of this research is the issue of access to information on the Chinese film industry, which imposed an issue of inevitable bias in my own methods. One of the tactics I used was to cross-compare other sources such as newspapers and bloggers. I met problems where the language barrier was concerned due to issues around translation and interpretation. I used a translator at various points and made use of online translation tools such as Google translator; an established tool for academics doing work in this area (Molloy, 2011).

Due to the language barrier, I could not get first-hand access on market tastes, which meant I had to rely on second-hand data. This means that my assertions about Chinese audiences and marketing tactics are based on second-hand information. It also meant that I could not access industry data that is in Chinese. Also, being a private company, Legendary doesn't disclose its financial information. This means that I had to rely on information from the trade press on Legendary's financials.

Another limitation in terms of access to information lay in my reliance on websites such as the *Internet Movie Database* (IMDb) and *Box Office Mojo* for data on release dates, box office revenue, and MPAA ratings. IMDb presents a problem because it is user-generated - although data goes through consistency checks. *IMDbPro* and *Box Office Mojo* are recognised industry resources used by industry personnel as a personnel directory and to follow box office results (McNary, 2019). Scholars also use these sources (see Kokas, 2017), along with the trade press (De Vany, 2004). These were also my only access to box office data, particularly for the Chinese market. This lack of available information meant that I was forced to use the data available at these sites. Box office data is itself not as important in industry analysis since revenue now comes from so

many ancillary markets (Epstein, 2012) but I have used it because it is the most useful indicator of cinema attendance in the Chinese market. Box office data in the trade press is interesting, but is not the full picture, which is why I use box office figures to supplement my findings rather than form its basis. Box office data is also often inconsistent across multiple sources. This is particularly an issue in Chinese box office reporting where, as Stanley Rosen notes, 'the use of computerised box office data is a recent phenomenon in China and most data comes from the film companies rather than the theatres, generally leading to inflated results' (2012: 203).

Chapter 1:

Phase One of the Contemporary Hollywood-China Relationship: “China and Hollywood” (1994 - 2010)

This chapter covers what I have termed the first phase in the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship. I suggest that the Hollywood-China relationship between the years 1994 to 2017 can be labelled and periodised into four key phases, based on the kind of demarcation that Yannis Tzioumakis (2013) used to differentiate between the relationship between Hollywood and American independent cinema. Tzioumakis (2013: 30) defines the terms, ‘independent’, ‘indie’, and ‘indiewood’ as labels that connote a ‘specific expression of independent filmmaking’ and at the same time ‘represent distinct trends within fairly clearly demarcated periods of time in the recent history of the sector’. The relationship between Hollywood and China can be similarly periodised and labelled. As Tzioumakis (2013) points out in his periodisation, the start and end cannot be easily or definitively concluded. However, the phases I outline are characterised by specific industrial trends and developments distinctly enough to be able to situate them within a timeline.

The first phase spans the years 1994 to 2010. I refer to this phase as the “China and Hollywood” phase because, notably, at this time Hollywood was not doing anything “China-special”, because the Chinese film market was underdeveloped and - with the exception of *Titanic* - the might of the Chinese box office had not yet been proven. This was a time when Hollywood had limited access to the Chinese film market, but where Hollywood films - that were not specifically tailored to the China audience - were incredibly popular. The period starts with the release of *The Fugitive* (1993); the first Hollywood film to be released on a revenue sharing basis. The “China and Hollywood” period ends in 2010 when, following the unprecedented success of *Avatar* (2009) and with the increase of funding into the regeneration of the Chinese film exhibition

industry, the potential of the Chinese film market revenue was revealed. Although this phase starts in 1994, my industrial analysis starts in 2005 when Legendary Pictures was founded because the purpose of this thesis is to examine the relationship between China and Hollywood during the years 2005-2017. However, it was necessary to start the periodisation earlier (in 1994) because that was the start of the events that characterised the relationship up to 2010.

This chapter is designed to begin the first stage of the industrial analysis of Legendary Entertainment. Using industrial and economic analysis, this chapter critically appraises the circulating discourse that surrounded Legendary at the time of its founding as, largely, promotional spin that sought to align the company - as an industry newcomer - with the carefully crafted media persona of the company's founder, Thomas Tull. This chapter will address the circulating discourse in the trade press with regards to Tull's background and character, as well as the formation of Legendary, the two being inseparably interconnected, critically engaging with this branding exercise to assess the ways in which it shaped and impacted upon the Legendary brand and strategy. Circulating discourse, in this context, refers to the appearance of repetition in secondary cultural texts. These repetitions form what Foucault (1981) refers to as commentaries. In trade press and marketing materials, Tull's media presence was designed to reflect the values that Legendary were supposed to have: fan identity, astuteness, diligence, creativity and uniqueness. Furthermore, the trade press narrative indicates that Tull and, by extension, Legendary, were early adopters of a China-strategy. However, this chapter will show that Tull's strategy was not "unique", and Legendary's China-focus was part of a much wider and well-observed industrial trend wherein Hollywood studios were experimenting with inroads to China. For the purpose of providing a micro-history of Legendary, it is crucial to establish its economic, strategic and historical origins. At the time of Legendary's foundation, the company was one of the key examples of a new wave of Wall Street slate financing deals in Hollywood that would go on to shape funding models in the industry. This chapter situates Legendary within this wider industrial

setting and in doing so establishes the company, at its nascent stage, as a financier rather than a production company. Finally, this chapter provides an essential backdrop to the developments in the Chinese film industry so as to establish the state of the Hollywood-China relationship at the time of Legendary's beginnings and the very early signs of Legendary's China-strategy.

In existing scholarly work on Hollywood studio case studies, many authors begin by providing a brief biography of each studio's founder (e.g., Gomery, 2005; Tzioumakis, 2012; Balio, 2013). In the case of Legendary, that person is Thomas Tull, who founded the company, was a majority stakeholder, and remained Chief Executive Officer (CEO) until the Dalian Wanda takeover in 2016. There was much agreement in the trade press in Legendary's early years that Tull was an unusual studio head because he did not come from a traditional film background, but rather from a career in private equity, hedge funds and entrepreneurialism (e.g. Baker, 2009; Brophy-Warren, 2009; Garrahan, 2010; Graser, 2010; McClintock, 2005a; Owczarski, 2012). Tull's background, along with his carefully articulated media image, were created and deployed as part of a branding exercise to establish Legendary's place, status and identity within the industry. This chapter will identify indicators of a "Tull mythology", and, crucially, analyse its impact on the Legendary brand and trajectory. The Tull mythology is comprised of several interrelated qualities. First, coming from a reportedly modest upbringing and working hard to create success and upwards social mobility, Tull's background was used to position him as an example of the ethos of the "American dream". Second, his much-touted fanatical love for films, comics and computer games was constructed in a way to create a "producer-auteur" persona that lends Tull, and by extension Legendary, artistic credibility. Third, Tull's Wall Street background was framed to underscore his innovative finance strategies, as demonstrated in the way he structured Legendary's deals with investors and with Warner Bros. And finally, Tull's reported astuteness was credited for enabling him to recognise the potential of the Chinese market and adopt an "early" (in comparison to other studios) China-strategy. I use the term mythology because I argue

that this persona is a collection of myths wherein myths are taken to mean stories - or narratives - that are transmitted and repeated in order to establish understanding (Barthes, 1973). I also use the term mythology to signify the idea that - although all the facets of the Tull mythology have aspects of truth to them - they are subject to exaggeration, particularly in the way that they create a Great Man narrative, a term coined by Thomas Carlyle in 1840 to describe the way that the lives of particular heroic historical figures - who are also male - are used to explain history (Carlyle, 1993). Since the mythology was transmitted by the trade press, it must be approached with criticality. Critical analysis of the Tull mythology reveals that the narrative constructed is fundamentally undermined by inconsistencies, as will be shown in this chapter. The purpose of the Tull mythology was unquestionably to publicise Legendary and there was an inherent promotional bias in the reporting. The “American dream narrative” is a popular technique used to promote individuals in the film industry - particularly indie auteurs - and Tull’s background was promoted in the same way. Tull’s status as a producer is highly questionable and the idea that Legendary was run on the tastes of an individual is unrealistic in commercial cinema. Although Legendary is a good example of the influx of Wall Street finance in Hollywood, it was just one example, and was not as innovative as the discourse suggests. Far from Tull adopting an early China-focus, Legendary was, again, an example of a much wider trend. It is complicated because Tull, like any founder, *is* important, but it is crucial to identify how the discourse of Tull as a “fanboy” was constructed to underpin the identity of Legendary in the marketplace.

This chapter explores Legendary’s earliest signs of a China-focus. Much attention has been paid in the trade press to the influence of Chinese money in Hollywood - co-production deals, pandering to a growing market, investment in/acquisition of Hollywood studios etc. - but little is known about the Chinese investment of private equity into individual films. For example, the High Ranking Industry Person (2018) interviewed for this thesis made the point that ‘many of the big Legendary films had Chinese financial investment’, and that ‘Wanda’s relationship with Legendary started as

a source of capital', but this is not reported anywhere. One of the problems with researching private investments is that they are often not made public. As such, little is known about the types of investments and transactions between Legendary and Chinese investors at an individual-film-level. Nevertheless, this chapter seeks to identify the first signs of Legendary's China-focus. Specifically, it situates Tull's comments about the importance of the Chinese market within a larger industrial trend.

This chapter establishes that Legendary was many things over the course of its development. The Legendary-Warner deal is examined: how it differed from comparable deals at the time and the ways in which it supported and influenced the Legendary China-strategy moving forwards. I draw on Douglas Gomery's (1986) industrial organisation framework, in which the structure, conduct and performance of a company is used to establish an economic analysis, to frame my analysis of Legendary's strategy. Combining interview data and industrial analysis I establish Legendary as a "financier with benefits", as opposed to a producing partner and as an example of "post-postclassical Hollywood". The choices Legendary made with regards to what films they financed with Warner Bros. is analysed, paying particular attention to those that received a Chinese release. This analysis reveals the influence of the Chinese market on Legendary's strategy, building on Caitlin Manning and Julie Shackford-Bradley's (2010) work on analysing how films attempt to 'engage globalisation' in their stylistic, formal, and tactical strategies.

Legendary's deal with Warner Bros. had a defining impact on Legendary as a company, which in turn both influenced and enabled their China-strategy. Firstly, through their association with a major studio, Legendary was able to enter the industry with an 'immediate caché' (McClintock, 2005b). The Legendary-Warner Bros. deal was a twenty-five film slate finance arrangement. What made it interesting was that, according to the terms, Legendary was reportedly given more creative control than is usual in slate finance arrangements, including to "cherry pick" the films they financed (Block and

Masters, 2013; Graser, 2013a). Additionally, the arrangement was said to include a provision for Legendary to seek and produce their own films. Most importantly, in the context of their relationship with Warner Bros., Legendary was commonly referred to as a production company - rather than or in addition to a financier - in the trade press (Barnes, 2007; Brophy-Warren, 2007; Fritz, 2011a; Garrahan, 2010; Goldsmith, 2005; Graser, 2010; Graser, 2013b; Kit, 2007; McClintock, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; McClintock and Goldsmith, 2006a; Owczarski, 2012). It is essential to note the differences between co-productions and co-finance arrangements, where the former refers to two or more film production companies collaborating and sharing rights, goods and services, and the latter refers to arrangements whereby the partnership is between that of a film production company and a financial partner and, specifically, the financial partner is not a co-owner of the constitutive elements (Enrich, 2005; Goettler and Leslie, 2005; Morawetz et al., 2007). As this chapter will show, the deal between Legendary and Warner Bros. was financial, with a view to producing that never materialised during the collaboration. The analysis of the Legendary-Warner Bros. alliance and the films released during this stage, enables an examination of the Legendary strategy and the construction of the Legendary brand with particular reference to the ways in which the Warner Bros. association helped Legendary to establish a China-strategy.

The Tull Mythology

The circulating discourse around Legendary's founding and founder, Thomas Tull, contributes to what I argue is a carefully constructed mythology designed to use Tull's purported personal attributes and history to, by extension, associate the nascent Legendary with those precise qualities. In contemporary capitalist culture branding presents an economy of symbolism which is used in multiple ways in entertainment economies such as the film industry (Grainge, 2008). Hollywood has long since operated in the exchange values of branding to ensure corporate power through star power, logos

and trademarks, licensing and cross-promotional tie-ins (Grainge, 2008). Blockbusters in particular utilise what Justin Wyatt (1994) calls ‘high concept’ techniques, which promote easy-to-understand, marketable narratives that are designed to appeal to a broader audience. Branding is also the defining characteristic of post-postclassical Hollywood, where studio, film and personal branding - as exemplified in the Tull mythology - is at the core of industrial norms.

In addition to star power, trademarks and product tie-ins, cases have been made for the branding of directors (often through the auteur theory), studios and even producers. Auteur theory originated from the French New Wave cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, where French critics generated the term to refer to the idea that a film is a reflection of a director’s artistic vision and that directors who are auteurs use recurring themes and recognisable visual styles. Since many of the early auteurists (such as François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard), were New Wave directors themselves, the term somewhat inevitably became a badge of honour used to publicise the work of specific directors or as a tool of self-promotion (Naremore, 2000). In this specific regard, one facet of auteurism is undeniably a branding exercise: an auteurist marketing discourse. Just as stars can lend their brand to the films they appear in; directors can lend their branding to the studios they work for. This kind of “narrative promotional strategy” is often used by indie directors and indie producers to create an “indie narrative” designed to commodify and promote directors and their films (Molloy, 2016). Less discussed is the extension of this narrative where film producers are concerned. Andrew Stubbs (2019: 1) explores the management of what he terms ‘indie-auteurism’, which he defines as ‘a discursive construct conveying authenticity, autonomy, artistry, natural talent, innovation and quality attached to authorial figures associated loosely with American independent or indie film’. Andrew Spicer et al. (2014) note that, just as auteurists use the director as a vantage point for textual analysis, the producer can provide a similar site for viewing and understanding films and the industry more broadly. Such case studies exist; key examples include Harvey and Bob Weinstein (Perren, 2012), Irving

Thalberg (Vieira, 2010), and the Warner brothers (Thomson, 2017). As Spicer et al. (2014: 7) point out, the study and understanding of the role of the film producer is complicated by a deliberate shroud of ‘myth and mystery’ and is often used as a title interchangeable with other roles such as investor, studio head, mogul and more. This is particularly important in the case of Legendary and Thomas Tull because he was given a producer title during the company’s arrangement with Warner Bros., which was an entirely financial arrangement, as will be discussed later in the next chapter. However, it is important to note at this stage that one of the key components of the Tull mythology was the promotion of Tull as a producer, rather than a financier. I argue this was in order to make use of the self-promotional attributes of the producer-as-auteur construction.

In the case of Hollywood studios, historically their initial branding is closely linked with the studio’s founder. Warner Bros. was synonymous with Jack Warner and his brothers, Disney was synonymous with Walt Disney, United Artists with Chaplin, and so on. The circulating discourse around Legendary at the time of its founding was directly associated with the discourse relating to Legendary’s founder and CEO, Thomas Tull. The “Tull mythology” centralises his reported uniqueness, film fanaticism, passion and business acumen. These characteristics are unanimously attributed to Tull in interviews and trade press coverage (Cheney, 2014; Owczarski, 2012; Baker, 2009; Holson, 2005; Kit, 2007; Garrahan, 2010; Brophy-Warren, 2009; Block and Masters, 2013; Abrams, 2013; Guy, 2018; Graser, 2010; Graser, 2014a; Pomerantz, 2013), suggesting that Tull is not like other Hollywood moguls, and, by proxy, that Legendary is not like other studios. In the press, Legendary is inextricable from Tull, and is often referred to as variants of ‘Tull’s production shingle’ or ‘Thomas Tull’s Legendary’ (Abrams, 2013; Guy 2018; Baker, 2009). In her interview, Jillian Share (2018) noted that Tull was ‘undoubtedly’ the ‘driving force’ behind Legendary’s strategy. This continuous reassertion of Tull’s power and influence on Legendary’s day-to-day running is consistent throughout his tenure at the company. However, as this chapter will outline, Tull’s influence was only one of many.

Tull's background is heavily featured in the trade press as part of the Legendary branding exercise, purposefully articulated to construct Tull as an example of the "American dream", where the American dream is taken to mean that any American person - regardless of social status or circumstances of birth - has the right and opportunity to prosper and succeed through hard work and to achieve upwards social mobility for themselves and their family. Tull was reported to come from 'modest circumstances' (Brophy-Warren, 2009) and went on to achieve prosperity, success and upwards social mobility. Tull's 'modest' background was often referenced in the press (Barnes and Forsythe, 2016; Brophy-Warren, 2009; Kilday, 2014; Masters, 2016; McClintock, 2005a; Rainey, 2015; Robehmed, 2016). Tull was born in 1970 and grew up in upstate New York, just outside Binghamton where he was raised by a single parent, his mother, a dental hygienist (Brophy-Warren, 2009). Speaking about his unexceptional childhood, Tull noted in an interview, 'if I saw what I'm doing now, I would definitely think that it was an apparition from the future playing a trick on me' (Tull in Baker, 2009). To exemplify his hard working attitude the trade press highlighted his early-onset work ethic, suggesting that Tull, mindful of the financial struggles he, his mother and two sisters faced, mowed lawns in the summer and shovelled snow in the winter to help make ends meet (Robehmed, 2016). Tull's fanatical interest in popular culture is also written into this biography as a way to legitimise his move from the finance sector to the film industry. In the press, reports tell the story of a young Tull, seeking escape in the form of science fiction and fantasy books and films (Robehmed, 2016; Baker, 2009); a story that, irrespective of how true it may or may not be, casts Tull in the kind of upbringing common to Legendary's target audience demographic: fanboys.

According to reports, after graduating from college Tull tried out a number of careers: owning coin-operated laundry businesses and car-repair businesses (Owczarski, 2012; Robehmed, 2016; Billboard, 2005), as well as founding Tax Services of America and in 1996 helped to shape a deal to launch Red Storm Entertainment, which specialised in adapting Tom Clancy novels into video games, his first foray in the entertainment

industry (Owczarski, 2012). From the mid-1990s Tull climbed the ranks as a private equity investor on Wall Street, becoming a principal at the largest venture capital IT fund in the Southeast, Southeast Interactive Technology Funds, before ascending to president of the Convex group, a media and entertainment holding company. Tull is credited with having the idea for Legendary about 18 months before they secured their slate financing deal with Warner Bros. in response to a conversation, he had with a studio chief, MGM President Chris McGurk in which Tull realised that the film industry was ‘the biggest industry... in which private equity hasn’t played a significant role’ (Tull in Gross, 2006). After learning about the changing nature of the film business, in particular the development of the home entertainment and foreign sales markets, Tull claimed to have seen an opportunity in the market that was much more interesting for private equity players, which he noted marked a change from the previously sceptical attitude held by such players, due to the many stories of them losing money (Gross, 2005). Indeed, Hollywood economics are characterised by uncertainty (De Vany, 2004) and ambiguity (Epstein, 2005), where risk mitigation has an important economic value and where individual investors are at considerably higher risk than studios (Vogel, 2015). At the time of its founding there were deals similar to Legendary’s - which will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter - but it is important to point out at this stage that a large part of the Tull mythology was focused on positioning Tull at the epicentre of the new wave of Wall Street investment. There is an assumption, backed up by the circulating discourse in the trade press, that Tull’s business acumen and his ability to spot an opportunity and pave the way for Wall Street investors was unique. However, as this chapter will go on to demonstrate, Tull’s strategy was just one example of a well-documented trend of Wall Street and private equity investment around that time (Abrams, 2011a, 2011b; Barnes, 2007; Chaney, 2005; Goldsmith, 2005; Gross, 2006; Block and Masters, 2013). Nevertheless, Tull was positioned at the forefront of this trend, using a personal anecdote in which, during a dinner with a studio executive, Tull appears to have “come up with” the idea for private equity investment in Hollywood (Brophy-Warren, 2009; Gross, 2006). In an interview with *The Financial Times*, Tull said,

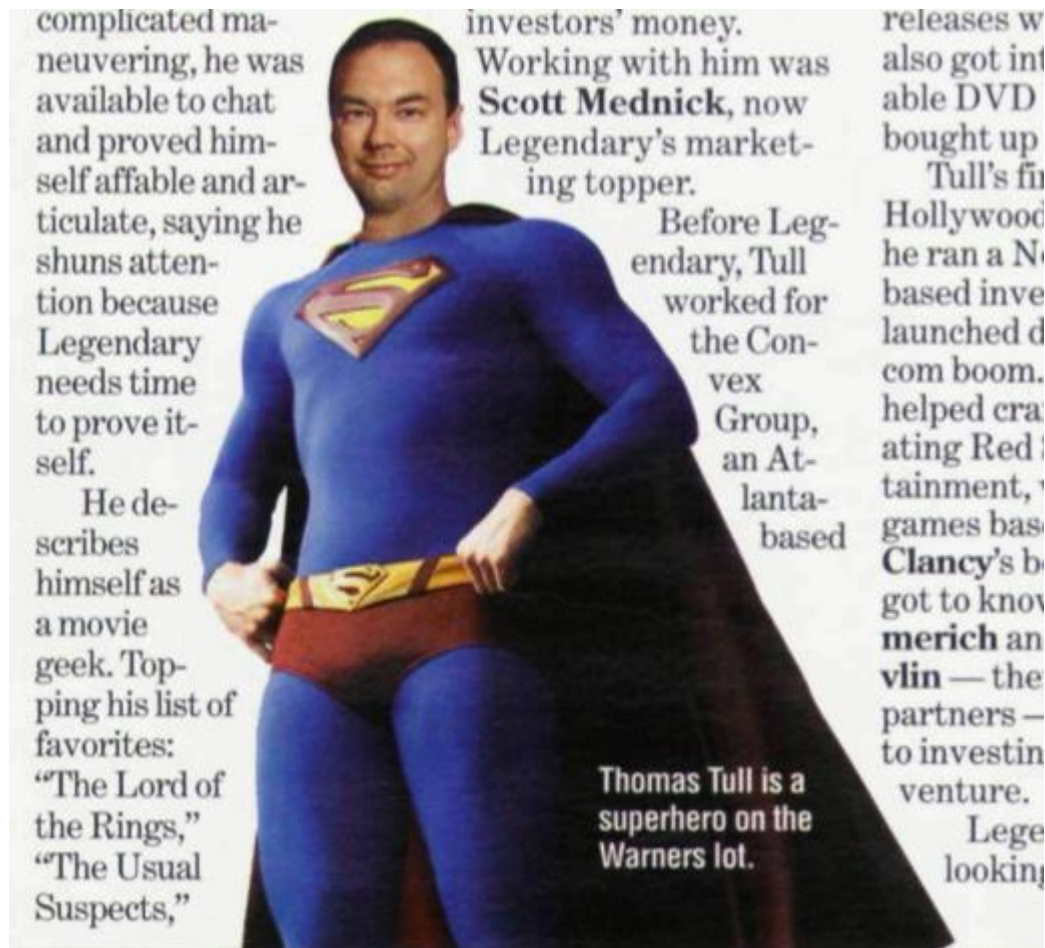
I was coming out to LA on business a lot and was starting to get to know more and more people [in Hollywood], [...] I started putting together a plan that would take the business of private equity and a creative sensibility to make a new kind of production company with a focus on the kind of movies that I wanted to make (Tull in Garrahan, 2010).

In an interview with *Variety*, Tull claimed to have personally “educated” investors, explaining ‘they’re smart people and they learn fast...but the film business is different from a typical investment in technology or biotech’ (Tull in Gross, 2006).

In order to counterbalance Tull’s lack of experience in the film industry, the trade press widely reported that he surrounded himself with Hollywood veterans including the former TriStar Pictures production chief, Chris Lee, Scott Mednick, a renowned marketing executive, and the former Chief of Financial Operations of Creative Artists Agency (CAA), Larry Clark. This arsenal of experienced industry experts undermines the idea perpetuated by the Tull mythology that Legendary was a company built on the innovative experience and tastes of a single individual. Additionally, Legendary was backed by major private equity, hedge fund and corporate players including AIG Direct Investors, Bank of America Capital Investors, and Falcon Investment Advisors (Owczarski, 2012; Holson, 2005; Barnes, 2007; McClintock, 2005a) as well as ABRY Partners, Colombia Capital and M/C Venture Partners. Perseus banking firm acted as a financial adviser to Legendary in the transaction (McClintock 2005b) who would undoubtedly not have invested in the vision of an individual. In his interview with *Billboard* (2005), Tull described the fundraising process as ‘long’ and ‘arduous’, reinforcing the hard-working ethic that is an essential component of the Tull mythology, but successful in raising \$500 million in ‘committed capital’ which Tull identified as enough of a sum to be able to ‘do everything from tent-poles to anything else’ but noted that the deals were scrutinised to ensure the success of the arrangement; ‘in a normal deal you would have 100% due diligence. This was more like 200%’ (Tull in Billboard, 2005). This idea of heightened scrutiny and “due diligence” also fed into the circulating discourse around Tull’s work ethic. Indeed, according to the trade press, it was precisely

this additional level of vigilant research that went on to inspire confidence in banks and investors throughout Legendary's lifetime; reports claimed that investors were sold on Tull as much as they were on the studio itself (Abrams, 2013). According to the Tull discourse, his background in finance and his hard-working character gave him a unique advantage. In her interview, Jillian Share (2018) noted that Tull had a 'non-traditional film background', his 'Wall Street mentality' enabled him to create a 'Wall Street model for film'; 'he definitely changed the game'. This centralisation of Tull's significance and individualised credentials reveals the Great Man identity that Tull (and Legendary) were aiming to project. Carlyle's work on the Great Man theory centralises the interconnectedness between the Hero, the act of hero-worship, and the historical context of a hero's lifetime (Carlyle, 1993). Tull was one of a number of people (mainly men) that came to the film industry from the deregulated finance sector from the 1990s. However the Tull mythology positions him as a Great Man; the deciding factor in Legendary's history, owing to his "unique genius". Contributing to the Great Man myth surrounding Tull, the trade press crafted an image of a studio chief with 'strong talent ties', 'entrepreneurial spirit' and a sophisticated grasp of the industrial setting, and trends therein. Arguably, as requisites for the job, these characteristics can be attributed to most producers working in the industry. It is also important to note that at this early stage in Legendary's lifetime, Tull was primarily a financier. So the projection of Tull as auteur-producer is particularly interesting.

Fig. 1.1: Thomas Tull superimposed on the body of Superman in *Variety* (McClintock, 2005a).



In addition to the wide reporting of Tull's talent for business and finance, Tull's image was just as equally built up around his passion for films, often described as a self-confessed "fanboy", preoccupied with comics and videogames (Garrahan, 2010; Graser, 2010; McClintock, 2005a; Graser, 2014a; Owczarski, 2012). Historically fans are represented as 'brainless consumers', devoted to the 'cultivation of worthless knowledge', infantile, social misfits (Jenkins, 1992: 10). The addition of the gender pronoun assigns a gender identifier to the role (indeed, the term fangirl exists to refer to the female), and refers to an audience demographic, typically young and male, that engages passionately with film, TV, comics and video games. Crucially, fanboys are

differentiated from fans; the former are considered authorities and are legitimised where the latter are considered uncritical consumers (Scott, 2013). This type of participatory culture is inherently convergent and fanatical. This fanaticism makes fanboys both powerful and critical. Powerful inasmuch as they represent a particularly attractive demographic and are large in numbers and characteristically critical due to their heightened connection with the intellectual property they are scrutinising and hard to please. In her work on the “fanboy auteur”, Suzanne Scott (2013: 441-442) suggests that, ‘the convergence-era fanboy auteur’s business is not simply to sell himself as both auteur and a fan, but as a particular type of auteur and fan’. According to Scott (2013: 441) a fanboy auteur is an ‘affirmational fan’ as opposed to a ‘transformative fan’, where affirmational refers to those fans who, ‘typically aligned with “masculine” viewing strategies’, are ‘primarily invested in decoding authorial content’, and transformative refers to ‘feminist counter-readings’ of a text. According to Julie Levin Russo (2010), transformative fans are a product of a long tradition of ‘Fanon over canon, appropriation over documentation, and multiple interpretations over hierarchical authority’. Crucially, Scott (2013: 442) notes that fanboys ‘are considered “sanctioned” fans, in large part because they privilege “correct” authorial interpretations and can be more easily incorporated by the industry as promotional agents’. This is particularly important in the case of the Tull mythology. With reference to the fanboy auteur, Scott (2013: 442) notes,

Though this affirmational/transformative binary falls prey to problematic gender essentialisms, the particular strain of masculinity that the fanboy auteur typically sells benefits the industry on multiple fronts. By privileging and performing affirmational modes of fannish textual engagement that recognise the auteur as the source of meaning, the fanboy auteur models and projects the relationship the industry would like fans to have with their franchises (namely, one of reverential respect for artists and properties).

Using Scott’s determination of the fanboy auteur, I propose that the construction of Tull’s producer image used a similar model only with a producer instead of director; a “fanboy producer”. In doing so, Tull’s/Legendary’s reputation is afforded a legitimacy

through its self-characterisation as fanboy producer. Tull specifically aligns himself and his personal taste with fanboys. In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, Tull expressed, ‘this is my group...they like the stuff I like’ (Tull in Brophy-Warren, 2010).

I have loved the movies since I was a little kid. You sit in a theatre, and you never know where you will end up. I was and am a real film geek. I never had aspirations to be an actor or director, but I feel fortunate to have been successful in other businesses because it has given me the opportunity to make movies. (Tull in Block and Masters 2013).

He is often referred to as a ‘geek’ who makes films that ‘he’ and other ‘geeks’ would want to see (Graser, 2010); in an interview with Andy Sewer for U.S. *Zeitgeist* in 2010, Tull stated ‘we wanted to make sure that we made, on the financial side, make sure that we made responsible decisions. But then, on the other side, I make movies I want to see’ (Tull in *Zeitgeistminds*, 2010). This rhetoric reinforces the personal connection between Tull - and by extension Legendary - and their film output, strengthening the producer-as-auteur image. Tull is just one member of a new generation of film executives who have grown up with comics and video games and are now using those intellectual properties to create large-scale tentpoles thanks to developments in technology and visual effects. Other examples include Kevin Feige, Geoff Johns, Kevin Tsujihara, and Avi Arad.

Nevertheless, Legendary’s success has been attributed to Tull’s passion for comics and video games. Speaking about Legendary’s branding, Jillian Share (2018) notes,

There was definitely a brand. We wanted the Legendary brand to mean something specific and to know our audience, so it was definitely directed at the fanboy/fangirl crowd, for lack of a better word. People at Comic Con: muscular, sci-fi, fantasy, supernatural. Things like that; the big blockbuster movie. That was definitely the mandate of what we were trying to find.

Thus, by highlighting Tull’s “fanboy identity”, Tull was acting as an ambassador for the Legendary brand, which was targeted at a specific demographic. *Variety* reported that,

'There's no magic formula to Legendary's success other than relying on Tull's taste and instincts, according to those close to [him]' (Graser 2010), and that Tull decided to make a *Godzilla vs Kong* film because he 'wanted to see them fight' (Lang, 2015a). However, the likelihood that a multi-million-dollar company would be so in thrall to the whims and tastes of an individual would appear to be at the most, a gross misrepresentation of the truth and, at the least, a convenient fiction through which the company image can be promoted. Other directors and producers have had similarly autonomous reputations, for example, Quentin Tarantino, Harvey Weinstein, Jack Warner and others. Andrew Spicer et al. note in their work on the role of the producer that, from the classical Hollywood period, producers can be seen 'valorising a more intuitive approach to film-making based on almost magical concepts such as 'gut instinct' in a deliberate mystification of their own role' (Spicer et al., 2014: 5). Claire Molloy (2016) highlights what she terms the 'neoliberal commodification of creative labour', using a case study of director Christopher Nolan to identify the textual, economic and ideological currency of indie auteurs. Using this same framework, I argue that Tull - through the promotion of his mythology - retains a similar "value" and that, crucially, this is typical of post-postclassical Hollywood, where personal branding dictates and manages industrial norms.

The projected image of Tull - and by extension Legendary - as a passionate producer who cares deeply and personally about the projects that Legendary takes on - is further exemplified in reports that Tull allows directors more freedom than they are used to as a result of his strong desire to preserve the artist's visions (Garrahan, 2010; Brophy-Warren, 2009; Cheney, 2014; Garrett, 2008a). Tull described Legendary as a 'very director-driven company...our job is to empower that [vision]' (Tull in *Zeitgeistminds*, 2010); 'One of the central pillars of our philosophy is to back the very best filmmakers, and to be part of projects that are part of our cultural fabric' (Tull in McClintock, 2005b). This rhetoric - a trait of post-postclassical Hollywood - serves to promote Tull, Legendary and the films themselves. For example, Bryan Singer, who directed *Superman Returns*

(2005) and *Jack the Giant Slayer* (2013) for Legendary, said of Tull, 'He has a filmmaker-centric view, which puts you at ease as a director' (in Garrahan, 2010). Zack Snyder, who directed *300* (2006), *Watchmen* (2009), and *Sucker Punch* (2011) for Legendary once remarked 'I think [Thomas Tull] understands whether it'll make money, because he looks at it as a fan' (in Brophy-Warren, 2009). Gareth Edwards, who directed *Godzilla* (2014) for Legendary and Warner Bros., noted in an interview with Alexandra Cheney that the studio was 'very filmmaker-friendly. During filming I kept turning to Seamus [McGarvey, the cinematographer] as we were filming and asked, "how normal is this freedom?" He told me that he had never worked on a film with this amount of freedom. But Thomas Tull protected me from everything and he's such a massive fanboy, we had a bit of a freak-out together' (Edwards in Cheney, 2014). This precise quote was critiqued by Claire Molloy (2016: 378) who in her assessment notes, 'Lurking within the industry and trade discourse is the claim that not only are indie filmmakers valued for their personal vision and artistic integrity, but they will be encouraged to maintain their creative autonomy and transpose it to the studio feature'. This statement can be aptly applied to Tull, also. An example of the kind of promotional spin designed and utilised by Legendary to establish and promote their brand lies in the claim made by *Variety* that Tull, 'believes that almost every great movie comes from a singular vision. So he lets directors essentially run with their creative ideas and remains relatively hands-off once a project has been developed and agreed upon. That means letting films be dark in tone or R-rated when they need to be' (Graser, 2010). In commercial cinema this kind of autonomy is not only highly unusual but is also at odds with the profit-oriented nature of the industry. These claims seem at odds with the Legendary strategy and their (necessary) focus on market trends. This appears to be a contradiction in the Tull mythology; on the one hand a director-focused film fan who believes the artistic vision should be paramount, and on the other hand a savvy businessman whose sales pitch to investors is precisely the increased profitability of the industry. This conflated characterisation is counterintuitive. In Molloy's (2016: 375) work she notes that discourses around independent directors as autonomous visionaries serves to 'distance

the work of independent filmmakers from that of the studios and their corporate realities and subsumes the artwork into the commodity form by denying its industrial-economic identity'. In the same way, the similar labels attributed to Tull suggest a disconnection between Tull's "fanboy producer-auteur" and Legendary's corporate reality. However, it makes complete sense when viewed as a tool of post-postclassical Hollywood branding, wherein financiers and producers, studios and films are branded in synergy to construct both product and industry.

Though not unique, Tull's background in business and finance, his track record of securing large amounts of funding, and his carefully crafted media persona, were likely instrumental in facilitating the company's connections with China. Tull's reputation for "recognising opportunities" may have been helpful in terms of recognising China's increased importance, but the circulating discourse that suggests that Tull - and Legendary - was an "early adopter" of a China strategy overstates the company's position. Other companies and studios were making inroads to China at the same time and before Legendary. These arrangements will be discussed at length in the next chapter, but it is important to note at this stage that perhaps the most significant part of the Tull mythology in terms of Legendary's China-strategy was the positioning of Tull as ahead of trends in adopting a China-focus. As Eric Hedayat (2018) noted in his interview,

Hollywood has a long history of taking anybody's money they can, to make movies. There's a lot of filmmakers that will do anything they can to get funding and there's a lot of people who would love to give money to Hollywood because it's glamorous in a way. So, the Chinese were the guys that showed up with a lot of cash saying, "we're interested in investing in your country and in your product".

According to the Tull narrative, his early adoption of a China-focus enabled him to cultivate relations with Chinese partners ahead of other studios, with an early eye on developing the company's China arm, Legendary East. In an interview with *Variety*, Tull

said, ‘we're committed [in China] ... It's somewhere that's big in our future. This has been a six-year process to put [Legendary East] together. It was important that we earn the right to be part of that community’. The Tull narrative itself took a China-focus, where Tull’s personal traits were described as humble and direct, and eschewing the fame and glamour of a typical Hollywood producer’s lifestyle (Frater, 2017a; Brophy-Warren 2009; Abrams and Graser, 2012a; Garrahan, 2010; Graser, 2010; McClintock, 2005a); ‘It is all part of his philosophy, which goes back to his childhood passion for comics and film. “All we care about is making movies,” he says. “Not getting a better table at Spago or anything like that.”’ (Garrahan, 2010). However, this public image was said to ingratiate Tull with Chinese partners (Robehmed, 2016) and likely earned him approval with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) who impose strong moral values on public figures (SAPPRFT, 2016).

Tull’s Wall St Model

According to Share (2018) and as reported in the press, Tull’s fundraising talents were key to the success of the studio. In the early days, however, Tull reportedly ran into scepticism from investors and had to ‘educate’ asset managers regarding film industry economics (Cheney, 2005). Using his media image as a fanboy-producer/auteur Tull was able to cultivate relationships which enabled him to ‘build a fanbase with billionaire backers’ (Graser, 2014). From the start Tull made the distinction between traditional funding and what Legendary was out to do, which was to start a fully functional production company. In her interview, Jillian Share (2018) noted, ‘Legendary is a unique company because it’s sort of a hybrid between being a producer and a financier’, ‘normally on a buyer side you’re not usually the person that’s the on-set producer. Legendary is unique in that you sort of play both roles’. During Legendary’s founding years, however, it was better characterised as a financier with producing aspirations, despite the circulating discourse to the contrary.

Bankers, financiers and the eliciting of ‘financial support from other wealthy individuals’ have been intrinsic to the production of motion pictures since their very inception (Wasko, 1982: 1). Outside investment is nothing new, indeed, as Wasko (1982) suggests, it is a fundamental source of finance for the industry. Thomas Tull’s approach, however, redefined the role of an outside financier in Hollywood. Financing from Wall Street funds has a reputation for coming ‘in part because bankers want to hobnob with celebrities at movie premieres’ (Snyder, 2006). Tull recognised early on that owning content - or intellectual property (IP) - is the most lucrative strategy and, unlike those satisfied with a share of the profit, was driven to acquire content early on. IP is a category of property that is intangible, intellectual works that include literary and artistic works, as well as copyrights, patents, and trademarks. IP is another fundamental component of post-postclassical Hollywood, which is built on branding - intrinsically linked with copyright and trademarks - and franchise filmmaking which is highly reliant on existing literary and artistic works from which franchises are built.

Tull’s vested interest in entering the film industry is made clear in the Tull mythology, where his financial acumen and fanboy fanaticism are brought to the fore. The motivation on the part of Warner Brothers is equally clear. Studios favour hedge fund investments because they ‘take all the work out of financing’ (Young, Gong and Stede, 2008) and enable studios to spread the cost and “hedge” their bets (McClintock and Siegel, 2017). In a typical hedge fund investment arrangement a studio and an outside fund will contribute half of a film’s production budget. Profits are then split after the studio deducts a distribution fee. The deal is thus structured to give the studio a larger share of the profit and, if a film fails, the fund will end up absorbing more of the loss than the studio (Snyder, 2006).

Tull’s investment in Hollywood came during an influx of Wall Street money from around 2004 and while the type of financing was not new, the sheer size and scale of the

investments was. The increase in outsider financing was a result of a perfect storm. The rising production and marketing cost for making films forced studios to seek additional outside finance. Meanwhile, North America was experiencing a global savings glut (Bernanke, 2009), which inspired investors to seek new, high-yield investment opportunities. Consequently, the influx of private equity and hedge fund financing began to challenge commercial banks in the film finance industry. As Harold Vogel (2015: 135) notes, Hollywood has always depended on large-scale financing, which often comes from unlikely places; in the 1980s it came in the form of direct investment from Japan, following which it came from ‘foreign banks and insurance-backed investors’, then it came from German public equity and from Middle Eastern financiers. The key driver behind this flow of Wall Street money into the industry was based on “portfolio theory”; the mitigation of investment risk over a diverse portfolio of films, added to which, the increased earning potential through the extended value chain of motion pictures and ancillary markets. According to Edward Jay Epstein (2012: 93) it was Isaac Palmer - in 2003, the then-senior vice president at Paramount - who came up with a ‘brilliant solution’ to entice wary hedge fund managers who lacked experience in film financing. Palmer’s plan to tap hedge funds ‘brimming with excess capital’ relied on offering the funds a cut of the studio’s internal rate of return; a rate which includes ‘every penny the studio makes from every source’ (Epstein, 2012: 92-93). The introduction of new revenue streams, such as cable and streaming services, which in turn provide multiple “windows” through which the studios can recoup their costs, meant that lenders have increased security, which was necessary to attract investors (Vogel, 2015; Epstein, 2012; Sparviero, 2015).

Tull’s approach and the Legendary Wall Street Model was, according to the trades, purported to differ from purely financial deals because Tull did not just want to invest, he wanted to be a producer and ultimately, to build a studio that owned intellectual property (McClintock, 2006a). According to Jillian Share (2018) Tull used his background in the finance industry to create a “Wall Street model” for film production. The company

was set up in a style akin to a venture-capital firm, treating each film like a start-up company (Owczarski, 2012), which was a strategy familiar to private equity and hedge fund investors. Like other slate financing arrangements, Legendary treated a slate of films like a portfolio, including a variety of budget ranges. Legendary's investors were investing in shares in Legendary itself rather than in individual films, which was an attractive option to investors because it meant their investment was not resting on the fate of a single film but rather on the performance of the company's production portfolio. However, rather than being an innovative approach, this technique of spreading investments over a portfolio of projects is industry standard (Anderson, 2009).

By 2008, however, investments in Hollywood were in decline, with hedge fund managers preferring to directly sponsor specific producers and directors rather than invest in the studios themselves. By 2011, the scale of hedge fund and private equity investment in Hollywood studios was down to \$2 billion (Boorstin, 2011). This scaling-back of Wall Street investment alongside other factors such as the financial crisis of 2008 and the dramatic drop in home entertainment profits significantly impacted Hollywood, with studios, more than ever, preferring to focus on large tentpole projects reliant on 'universal' storytelling, spectacle and visual effects. As Ben Fritz writes, 'studios realised that their assumption that they had to make every type of movie for everyone was no longer true. So they focused on the types of movies that delivered the biggest and most consistent profits to their publicly traded parent corporations' (2018: 22). The promise of "long tail" industry economics that had lured private equity and hedge funds to film industry investment was reversed when the revenue windows for films reduced amid the 'plummeting' of DVD sales (Fritz, 2018: 58). Crucially, the outside investors found themselves subsuming these losses for the studios, due to the nature of the arrangements (where individual investors bear the brunt of financial losses). Amid this downturn, as will be explored in the next chapter, thanks to their arrangement with Warner Bros., Legendary was able to satisfy its investors by investing in some of the studio's marquee franchises. The trades described Tull as being transparent in his

business dealings; for example, *Variety* reported that ‘Tull has long prided himself as being as transparent as possible to his investors. If a film is not going to perform, he’s going to own up and give them fair warning’ (Graser, 2015a). The promotion of these characteristics helped to assure investors of Tull’s personal approach to business dealings, making it an important part of the promotional discourse around Tull.

In his interview with Thomas Tull, Jamin Brophy-Warren (2009) writes, ‘when he first began raising money for Legendary, Mr. Tull consulted financial models to see if he could make money creating films for fanboys’ but, Brophy-Warren notes, Tull was ‘quick to note that making films “is not the widget business” and does not rely solely on data. Speaking to Lindsay Chaney (2005) Tull noted that ‘in assembling the institutional investments for Legendary, it was necessary to educate asset managers about film industry economics, practices and procedures in order to make them comfortable enough to invest with him. “They’re smart people and they learn fast,” he says, “but the film business is different from a typical investment in technology or biotech”’ (Chaney 2005). Speaking with Holson (2005) ‘Mr. Tull said he and Legendary’s management team had been talking about setting up the company for about 18 months and organised the deal with private equity investors in mind. “Significant due diligence was done”’. In 2005, Legendary Entertainment, then Legendary Pictures, emerged as a new company backed by \$500 million from private equity, hedge funds and venture-capital firms from corporate investors. These initial investors were all American companies, most of whom were familiar with investing in media companies. According to *Variety*, Tull engaged in a lengthy road show to attract investors, armed with data on the increased profitability of the film business to, in Tull’s words, ‘conquer the perception that nobody makes money in Hollywood but the talent and the studios’ (Tull in Gross, 2006).

The Legendary strategy was inseparable from the Tull mythology. Jillian Share (2018) recalled in her interview, ‘I think it was a team effort for sure, but certainly Thomas not

doing things in a traditional way was sort of a fresh take on things'. Meanwhile in his interview, Eric Hedayat (2018) recalled Tull's influence,

Most studios that I'd dealt with in the past, not as an in-house exec but as, in a production capacity on the ground, it's usually a corporation that's still run by individuals, but it's not helmed by one person like Legendary was helmed by Thomas Tull. So, it was very much a reflection of his efforts and desires as he decided what to do, moving forward, preferring different movie projects. I do not know what the analogy would be; it would be like working with a large company that is helmed by an entrepreneur, versus a large company that is more of a committee, in a sense.

This setup is reminiscent of the classical studio system era when studios and productions were often helmed by single decision-makers. More recently, studios like Miramax were renowned for the exerting control of the CEOs, the Weinstein brothers. Thus, although Hedayat suggests this system was unusual in the current production system, there are prior cases where this has been a regular feature. Eric Hedayat notes the impact this had on production: 'We tended to move very quickly at Legendary and not spend a lot of time talking about what we might do, we just did it' which involved 'less sign off and less bureaucracy' and a more fluid work environment, 'I actually wore two different hats, and I did that a few times with Legendary'. This apparent lack in following the normal "bureaucratic" procedures marks a contrast with Tull's purported fondness for stating how he performs "due diligence" in his business ventures.

Early Signs of Legendary's China-strategy

The final facet to the Tull mythology is the idea, as promoted retrospectively by the trade press, that Tull - and Legendary - was one of the early adopters of a China strategy. I use the term "retrospectively" because it was around the time that Legendary announced its venture into China with a Chinese-arm (Legendary East, which will be the subject of

chapter two) that the trade press began reporting that Tull's adoption of a China strategy was in some way early and that his purportedly unique skills (the aforementioned facets of the Tull mythology) positioned him in an advantageous position to enter and develop ties with China. Indeed, as will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter, Legendary's trajectory into China and the formation of Legendary East provides a very interesting insight into a wider trend of the time, but it is just one example of the trends that resulted from China's opening up following its re-entry to the WTO and the consequent opportunities that presented, particularly in the opportunities for offshore labour as well as a market of super consumers. As noted by Andrew Ross 'China's nonstop growth is now on everybody's lips' (2006: 3). In his interview, Eric Hedayat (2018) noted,

Thomas, I think had decided, years before the Wanda acquisition, this is the plan. Because you've heard the stories about the U.S. box office, it's been going down over the years. So they were looking ahead saying, "ok, we're going to look at China now, as the new market" because China's emerging and it's a big deal to go to the theatre there. Whereas here, we just want to sit at home on our big screen TVs with surround sound and watch at home.

Here Hedayat is pointing to a significant factor; that the consumption of films at multiplexes has been a part of U.S. culture since their inception, whereas in China, multiplexes are still a novelty. Certainly, as Hedayat points out, Tull's China-focus started a long time before the acquisition by Wanda, and likely a long time before the formation of Legendary East, and even at the point of Legendary's formation. However, it is important to recognise that Tull's - and Legendary's - China-focus was not unique, nor early. I argue that the first key phase in the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship begins with the early adopters of China-strategies post-Mao, Warner Bros., whose entrance to the market in 1994 marks a more realistic landmark at which to consider the early-comers in the Chinese market.

The increased awareness of the importance of the Chinese market is evidenced in the years following. For example, in 1998 *Titanic* (1997) broke Chinese box office records the potential of the market was further revealed and interest intensified. This prompted a surge in scholarly reflections on the influence of Hollywood and foreign films on the Chinese film industry and on Chinese society. Many saw the influx of Western films as a threat to Chinese culture and asserted the need for Chinese cinema to resist or suppress the Hollywood influence by improving or reasserting the Chinese film industry (Mu, 1999; Cheng, 1999; Hua, C., 1999; Hua, J., 1999; Jin, 1999; Lu, 1999; Wen, 1999; Zeng, 1999). Many referred to the success of *Titanic*, which they attributed to its humanity (in particular the way it represented the ideology of the class system) (Duan, 1999; Li, W. 1999), its hype (Li, W. 1999) and the quality of the directing and effects (Li, W. 1999). Scholars also spoke of the need for the Chinese film industry to develop (particularly in terms of marketing) (Li, W. 1999; Tang, 1999; Lu, 1999; Li, F., 1999). He Wenjin (1999) drew attention to *Titanic's* success as enabling a renewed understanding of the potential of the Chinese film market and, crucially, to 'analyse the principles of film circulation, and adopt business strategies targeted at box-office trends in various screening phases' in order for the Chinese film distribution industry to advance 'in a direction that is more scientific and rational'. Hu Jun (1999) noted the importance of high quality exhibition and distribution mechanisms, as well as 'stronger crackdowns' on piracy. Many referred to Disney's *Mulan*, praising Disney's representation of 'Chinese realities' by seeking advice and inspiration from Chinese people and culture and successfully blending Chinese heritage and Hollywood style (He, Z., 1999; Jing, 1999; Zhang, 1999; Yi, 1999; Peng, 1999). This scholarly attention, the revelation of the potential of the Chinese film market and the changes to import and distribution models shows that Hollywood's China-focus started long before Legendary.

Perhaps the most important event to cause Hollywood to focus more on China was the country's re-entry to the WTO, which was supposed to further open up the Chinese market. China's re-entry to the WTO was a double-edged sword, because the Chinese

government was fearful that opening up to Hollywood would be detrimental to the Chinese industry, which led to tightly controlled and restrictive policies. Nevertheless, the apparent opening up of China's film market revealed opportunities for U.S. film companies and led to the overarching trend in Hollywood's increased interest in China.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that Legendary's China strategy undoubtedly benefitted from their deal with Warner Bros. The deal with Warner Bros., will be analysed at length in the next chapter. Warner Bros. offered Legendary an inroad into China thanks to the former's significant history with the country. Warner Bros., perhaps more than any other Hollywood studio, had learnt through trial and error the nature of the obstacles faced when attempting to enter the Chinese market. As early as the 1930s, Warner Bros. ran its own Chinese distribution business from Shanghai, through a distribution contract with Nanjing Theatre (Xiao, 2013b; Warner Bros., 2002) up until the political upheavals of 1949. In the 1980s Time Warner dictated the terms of globalisation for Hollywood as the process of maintaining strong operations at home while achieving 'a major presence in all of the world's import markets' more specifically tapping overseas markets using horizontal expansion, while expanding vertically to enlarge their agendas and 'partnering with foreign investors to secure new lines of finance' (Balio, 1998: 58). In 1986 Warner co-produced *Empire of the Sun* (1987) with Shanghai Film Studio, the latter's first co-production with Hollywood in what would span a thirty year relationship (Su, 2017) and marked the first Hollywood studio production to be filmed in China (Miller et al., 2005). In 1994 Warner Bros. became the first major Hollywood studio to forge a distribution deal with China Film Group (Warner Bros, 2003; Su, 2016; Melnick, 2015) and the Warner Bros. picture, *The Fugitive* (1994), became the first revenue-sharing film in the 'newly opened Chinese film market' (Wang, 2010: 71). Prior to this a very small number of foreign films had been imported on a flat-fee basis (Groves, 1994).

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Warner's China relations was their plan for investment in the Chinese exhibition industry. Ross Melnick writes of China's 'woefully outdated exhibition industry' in the 1990s and its impediment to China's domestic and international growth, noting, 'Between 1990 and 1994, 10,000 of the country's 14,000 'authorised' cinemas were closed due to their age and/or lack of efficiency' (2015: 165). In March 2002, just three months after, and in direct response to China entering the WTO, Warner Bros. International Theatres (later Cinemas) (WBIC) entered into a 'definitive agreement' to open a nine-screen multiplex cinema in Shanghai in partnership with local companies, Shanghai Paradise Co. Ltd and Broadband Investment Limited of Hong Kong, becoming the first major theatrical distributor to do so (Warner Bros., 2002; Melnick, 2015). In the press release at the time, Warner Bros.' then-Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Barry Meyer, noted that this development had been a year in the making 'in anticipation of the dynamic changes' that they predicted would occur following China's ascension to the WTO (Meyer in Warner Bros., 2002). A year later the Chinese central government gave final approval for the already built multiplex, which featured the Warner Bros. logo and extensive Warner Bros. branding and, according to the press release, was the first time a major Hollywood film company had been allowed to 'extensively brand an in-country venue in China' (Warner Bros., 2003). The so-called Paradise Warner Cinema City went on to be the highest-grossing cinema in the country three years running (Landreth, 2006a). In 2004 WBIC extended its multiplex development plans, this time embarking on a joint venture with Shanghai United Circuit to build a multiplex in Nanjing and becoming the 'first Western cinema investor approved to hold majority ownership' (51%) made possible by ownership guideline revisions by the then-SARFT (State Administration of Radio, Film and Television) (Groves, 2003; Jie, 2004; Warner Media, 2004; Melnick, 2015). Furthermore in 2003, a new law was passed in China in order to attract investment from foreign cinema companies, which allowed foreign investors to hold a 75% stake in a joint venture cinema (Melnick, 2015; Yi, 2016). The new deregulation policies attracted significant investment and generated 'a cinema-building frenzy' (Yi, 2016: 1) that,

following collaboration between real estate and film exhibitors, led to a “multiplex boom”. These deregulation policies were, however, seemingly withdrawn in a new set of laws released in July 2005, which retracted the majority stake opportunities for foreign investors and required Chinese partners to own 51% stakes (or more) in all joint ventures (Melnick, 2015). In November of 2006, ‘unwilling to chance the next regulatory or legal challenge’ (Melnick, 2015: 168), WBIC abandoned their plans to continue building cinemas (Landreth, 2006a; Rosenberg, 2007, Melnick, 2015). Despite its exit from the Chinese exhibition industry, WBIC received praise for revitalising the Chinese film market and setting the industry standard for new multiplexes in China (Landreth, 2006b) and paved the way for others to establish development partnerships with Chinese cinemas (Melnick, 2015) including finishing some of the development projects WBIC had started. One such example was China Film Group who announced, shortly after the regulation changes, their plans to build a new cinema circuit that would include four of the cinemas it purchased from WBIC after they pulled out of the market (Landreth, 2006c). Ross Melnick notes, ‘Warner Bros.’s experience in China also reflected this complicated relationship between global investment, national identity and the shifting nature of law as it sways with cultural and political winds’ (2015: 171).

In 2002, Warner Bros. announced its first Chinese-language film, *Turn Left, Turn Right* (2003), a Hong-Kong-Singapore co-production (Warner Bros., 2003) and in the same year entered into a joint development, production and distribution of *Swordsmen of the Passes* a slate of ten Mandarin-language made-for-television films with a Mainland Chinese production company, Century Heroes, and a Hong-Kong partner, Salon Films (Warner Bros., 2003; Miller et al., 2005). Even more significantly, in 2004, following new regulations issued by SARFT, which allowed for Sino-foreign joint ventures in film production and distribution (Su, 2016), Warner Bros. announced the creation of Warner China Film HG Corporation, reportedly the first Sino-foreign joint venture filmed entertainment company ‘in the history of the PRC’ (Warner Bros., 2004), designed to produce and distribute Chinese-language films (Goodridge, 2004; Warner Bros., 2004).

In 2005, Time Warner announced a joint venture with China Audio Video (CAV), named CAV Warner Home Entertainment Co. (Warner Media, 2005), making Warner Bros. the first Hollywood studio to establish its own DVD/VCD distribution and marketing operation in China (Wang, 2010). Also in 2005, Warner Bros. became the first foreign distributor to release DVDs day-and-date in China at extremely low prices (Wang, 2010; Shen, 2005), adopting a China-strategy that involved combining price markdowns and ‘premature’ DVD releases (Ting, 2007) as well as adding extra content such as special features and interviews to legitimate copies (Kelly, 2005), all in an attempt to combat piracy, which was at the time rampant in China (Kelly, 2005; Wang, 2010; Ting, 2007). As a co-finance partnership, Legendary’s collaboration with Warner Bros. rewarded both sides and presented Legendary with experience, networks and distribution, allowing them to enter the industry and to begin to experience for themselves the obstacles that they would go on to navigate with regards to their entry to the Chinese market.

Recognition of China’s importance to the American film industry manifested in many ways, and these will be topics for discussion throughout this thesis. What is noteworthy at this early stage is that the Tull mythology perpetuated in the trade press, as well as his early adoption of a China strategy, uniquely situated Legendary from the early stages to establish the China-relations and to succeed where many others failed, in establishing a link with Chinese entities. Tull’s background in finance reportedly made him more attractive to Chinese investors, particularly as a result of his promotion as a diligent, fastidious and successful businessman via the circulating discourse of his “due diligence”. This technique utilises a kind of productive ambiguity; a use of analogous language where “due diligence” is consistently mentioned in relation to Legendary and Tull’s investment deals but is never explained. Tull’s reputation for not being interested in the “Hollywood lifestyle” and his projected image as preferring a more modest set of circumstances, likely made him more attractive to Chinese investors, since the CCP actively discourages lavish lifestyles and “money worship” (Lee, 2018). In addition, Tull was described as having an early appreciation for and acknowledgement of the

importance of the Chinese market which likely helped to find favour with Chinese investors.

The Legendary-Warner Bros. Deal

This chapter has addressed at length the self-image of Tull and brand-image for Legendary constructed through the media and in the trade press; specifically, the importance of his carefully crafted media persona as fanboy-producer/auteur. Legendary needed to partner with an established studio to provide the necessary infrastructure to distribute and market films on a global scale (Robehmed, 2016). Natalie Robehmed (2016) describes Tull as having ‘talked himself into a meeting’ with Warner Bros., from which a deal template emerged that would have Legendary co-finance and co-produce twenty-five films from the Warner Bros. slate by Legendary. This type of deal was not uncommon during the wave of hedge-fund finance that flowed into Hollywood in the mid-2000s. Other examples include Virtual Studios, Relativity Media, and Village Roadshow. These companies and the extent to which they mirror the Legendary model will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter. What appears to set Legendary’s deal apart is that, despite its entry to the industry as an unestablished studio, embedded into the terms of the agreement with Warner was the provision for Legendary to acquire and develop its own content, which Warner Bros. would in turn co-produce and co-finance (Barnes, 2007).

Numerous sources reported that Legendary was given the opportunity to ‘cherry-pick’ the films that they would be involved with (Share, 2018; Block and Masters, 2013; Graser, 2013; Robehmed, 2016). However this was contradicted by reports that Warner Bros. would keep some of their more lucrative films, such as the *Harry Potter* franchise, to themselves (Epstein, 2005; Barnes, 2007) or as in the case of the reduction of Legendary’s stake in *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) (Ulin, 2013; Fritz, 2011a; 2012).

According to Jay Epstein (2005) Warner Bros. would present Legendary with their options and, although Legendary had the right to refuse them, they were liable for \$6 million a year in overhead charges either way, making it in their interest to accept Warner's selection. As outlined in the previous chapter, one of the key inconsistencies in the Tull mythology is the role of Tull and Legendary as producers rather than financiers. This contradiction is brought to the forefront when examining the partnership between Legendary and Warner Bros.

According to a press statement released by Warner Bros. announcing the 'co-financing and production agreement' with Legendary, which it described as 'tentative', the 'multi-year, 25 picture agreement' was 'subject to certain provisions', which were not disclosed, and described the slate as 'jointly produced with and distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures' (Warner Bros., 2005a). As previously highlighted, one of the problems of researching financial arrangements of this kind is the lack of details made public, and in this case the deal was obscured by strict non-disclosure rules (McClintock, 2005b). It is, however widely reported that the terms of the deal included a fifty-fifty split on the financing of selected films, and that profits would likewise be split down the middle, minus Warner Bros.' distribution fee (McClintock and Goldsmith, 2006a; Chaney, 2005; Goldsmith, 2005; McClintock, 2005b). In addition, it was reported that included in the fifty-fifty split were the P&A (print and advertising) costs, which are usually expenses absorbed by the studio (McClintock and Goldsmith, 2006a; Owczarski, 2012; Snyder, 2006; Chaney, 2005; McClintock, 2005b). According to the deal Legendary would contribute an estimated ten percent of the distribution fee and both studios would share any profits proportionally (Robehmed, 2016). Despite his purported talents for fundraising, Tull described the initial financing process as 'the most difficult experience of my career, of my life by far' (Tull in Robehmed, 2016), which included 'an 'impassioned plea' to a small round of investors and a commitment to invest his own money, coupled with a credit line from JP Morgan' (Robehmed, 2016), following which Legendary was able to secure the necessary start-up cash from the initial investors. In

their press release Warner Bros. noted the vast experience of the ‘industry veterans’ that comprised the Legendary team. This wealth of experience was crucial given that Legendary was entering the industry with no production experience of its own. It appears safe to conclude, however, that this deal was significantly beneficial to both parties. The collaboration provided Warner Bros. with a significant stream of capital, enabling them to offset the risk of their expensive tentpole films. For Legendary the partnership secured distribution of their in-house projects and access to Warner’s well-established and extensive network of talent relationships.

By the start of 2006, the trade press reported that all the major studios had developed financial deals with private equity and hedge funds, primarily from Wall Street bankers (Snyder, 2006). Hollywood has a long history of dependence on money from outside the industry. Since the early 1990s, equity-based co-financing arrangements have been growing in number and, by no coincidence, in parallel alongside the steep incline of film budgets (Hofmann, 2013). In an industry characterised by extreme uncertainty (De Vany, 2004) co-finance relationships help to offset financial risks. Historically, Wall Street investors have been wary of investment in the film industry precisely because of its uncertainty. However, since the deals now typically include multiple, global revenue streams, including up to ‘every penny the studio makes from every source’ such as ‘pay-tv, DVDs, licensing to cable and network television, in-flight entertainment, foreign pre-sales, product placement, and toy licensing’ (Epstein, 2005) there are more ways for films to turn profits. Legendary went on to secure additional funding throughout their relationship with Warner Bros. (see Table 1), as Jillian Share (2018) noted in her interview,

Thomas [Tull] and Larry Clark went around and fundraised, essentially. That happened many, many times throughout the course of Legendary, where there was a different board of investors. Thomas was great at fundraising; that’s definitely a strong suit of his, and that came from his background. He was able to raise large sums to invest.

This continual sourcing of finance was one of the main ways in which Legendary was able to make a name for itself, as it became known in the trade press as one of the most well-capitalised production companies in the industry (Abrams, 2012a).

Table 1: Funds Raised by Legendary During Warner Bros. Partnership:

Year	Type
2006	Increased total capitalisation of the company from the initial \$500 million, to \$600 million (Kit, 2006)
2007	\$1 billion raised (extended partnership to 2013), a mix of new and junior equity and debt finance (McClintock, 2007; Brooks, 2007)
2011	Assembled \$700 million credit facility (Graser 2013; Abrams, 2012a)
2012	April: secured \$128 million in new capital and \$150 million in debt financing (Abrams, 2012a). December: raised \$443 million in equity (Graser 2013a; Abrams, 2012a)

The plan for the Legendary-Warner partnership, then, was to create ‘major event releases’ and films in varied genres as well as to allow Legendary to develop its own projects as part of the twenty-five-picture slate. The Warner Bros. deal was only made possible by Legendary’s financial backing in the form of investments from key private investors (Warner Bros., 2005a; Garrahan, 2010; Graser, 2010; Epstein, 2005). Alan Horn, then-president and chief operating officer at Warners, when announcing the deal, referred to it as a risk management deal in a highly competitive and costly industry (Warner Bros., 2005a). The trade press have continually highlighted Legendary’s desire to push their role as co-financier and to develop their own content in their deal with Warner Bros. (McClintock, 2005b; 2006a; 2006b; McClintock and Fritz, 2006; Barnes, 2007; Garrett, 2008a; Chaney, 2005; Goldsmith, 2005; Garrahan, 2010; Graser and

Abrams, 2011; Abrams, 2012a; Block and Masters, 2013), by reinforcing the message that Legendary's financial contribution was not to be considered a "fund" but rather to situate Legendary as an "operating company" in a producing partnership (Chaney, 2005; McClintock, 2005b). Jillian Share (2018) said of the relationship, 'There were other companies that were coming in and doing slate deals and financing. We were cherry-picking the Warner slate at the beginning...co-financing existing Warner Brothers projects. It was just [Tull's] model was slightly different, and we wanted to be creatively involved'. Regarding the difference in the Legendary model, Share (2018) noted, 'A lot of those companies are sort of betting on which movies are going to work and then putting half the money up. We, over time, started to develop our own ideas and in-house projects'. Although Legendary is an example of the increased presence of Wall Street financing in Hollywood films, it is different from other examples as it wanted to move beyond a purely financial relationship and more closely resemble an independent studio in its own right. As has been shown in chapter one, during their partnership with Warner Bros., Legendary did not have creative control over production. Instead, Legendary used their role as financier to aggressively enter the industry in order to build a brand as an independent studio.

A great deal of literature exists on how independent studios enter into the industry. In what is generally considered the contemporary era of American independent cinema (1980s to present date) (Tzioumakis, 2017; King, 2014; Molloy, 2010; King, Molloy and Tzioumakis, 2013), independent studios fall into two key categories: so-called 'mini-majors' and 'major-independents' (Tzioumakis, 2017). The term 'major-independent' refers to the independent production and distribution companies that are taken over by a conglomerate parent - a 'major' studio (Wyatt, 1998), such as in the case of Miramax and Disney, New Line Cinema and Turner Broadcasting System and others. A 'mini-major' refers to a company that exists outside of the major studios, but which is set up in a similar, albeit a smaller, fashion (Hillier, 1994). Mini-majors, when they are successful, are often co-opted into major-independents by the major studios as in the

case of Miramax, but they can also start life as an affiliated, designated independent or specialist arm of a major studio, such as in the case of Fox Searchlight (Tzioumakis, 2017). Legendary, however, appears to have taken a different approach; one that characterises post-postclassical Hollywood. Having started life in affiliation with, rather than owned by Warner Bros. it does not fit into the category of major-independent. Neither does Legendary fit the category of mini-major, because, although it was a company that existed outside of the major studios, it was *not* set up in a similar fashion. Crucially, it did not have production or distribution facilities. Mini-majors become successful if they establish a track record of producing and distributing profitable films, while in the case of major-independents, the “independent” division owes its creation to the success of the parent company. In this respect both categories have key similarities: both are producers and distributors of films, and both are reliant on a provable record of success. That Legendary was not and never has been a distributor immediately set it apart, and, as previously highlighted, they started with no history - no successes, no films whatsoever. This appears to discount it from either category. Instead they are better defined as by Jeffrey Ulin who describes how ‘the line between individuals (“angels”), major private equity type funds, and independents has become somewhat blurry’ with ‘pioneers of hedge type funds’, such as Legendary, ‘seeking more control, either demanding to have certain approvals over titles or, once achieving a certain scale, morphing into independent producers masquerading as would-be mini-majors’ (Ulin, 2013: 106). This description fits Legendary and Tull comfortably; for post-postclassical “studios” this “morphing” process takes place at the level of branding.

The branding process that transforms Legendary - at face value - from “financiers with benefits” to an independent production studio, is indicative of a much wider industrial trend; an extension of what Paul Grainge calls “brand Hollywood”, what I refer to as a “post-postclassical” Hollywood industry. The industrial, stylistic and economic shifts that enacted the transition between classical and post-classical Hollywood have been detailed in the literature review but are worth recapping here. Classical Hollywood is

characterised by the studio system, in which studios were Fordist production factories that owned and controlled production, distribution and exhibition. Post-classical Hollywood, then, refers to a period of increased fragmentation and specialisation in which studios were divested of their exhibition holdings and focused on blockbuster films that could be exploited in ancillary markets. Post-postclassical Hollywood, therefore, marks a distinct trend in Hollywood of *further* fragmentation, specialisation and blockbuster-focus that is based almost entirely on branding. Paul Grainge (2008) spends a great deal of time assessing what he terms ‘brand Hollywood’, that is, how Hollywood brands itself and how brands feature in Hollywood products. I suggest that Legendary takes the idea of “brand Hollywood” to its literal conclusion. In accordance with the characteristics of a post-postclassical Hollywood studio, Legendary has divested itself of every aspect of the components (production, distribution, exhibition) that made a classical Hollywood studio - indeed it never owned those components to start with. Instead, Legendary used a branding strategy to promote itself as a production studio: it was a “post-postclassical studio”. Instead of dealing in and with any of the traditional production, distribution and exhibition duties, Legendary dealt only in finance, but was still branded as a studio, and cultivated a distinct fanbase and a reputation of “delivering” specific, popular film. Thus, Legendary established itself as a “post-postclassical studio”.

In order to further establish Legendary’s entrance into and position within the industry it is necessary to compare them with similar companies. In her interview, Jillian Share (2018) references Virtual Studios as a company that adopted a similar strategy to Legendary. In 2005, six months after Legendary was formed, Virtual Studios entered the industry as a co-finance deal with Warner Bros. The key difference between the two was that Virtual did not share Legendary’s producer ambition, but despite this, the trade press reported a likely rivalry between the two companies (McClintock and Goldsmith, 2006b). Virtual, however, did not enjoy the same success as Legendary, having suffered losses with a string of unsuccessful projects co-financed with Warner Bros., most

notably, the 2006 film *Poseidon* (2006), which severely under-performed at the box office.

Two perhaps more closely comparable deals are that of Relativity Media and Village Roadshow. Relativity Media was founded in 2004, the same year as Legendary, and started life setting up film finance deals between independent studios and banks, hedge funds and private equity (Johnson, 2012). By January 2006 Relativity had raised \$600 million in finance from hedge funds to secure an eighteen-picture co-finance deal with Sony and Universal and, four months later, procured an additional \$700 million to fund an additional slate of nineteen films with the studios (LaPorte and Snyder, 2006). Relativity's trajectory at this stage follows a similar pattern to Legendary but differs in two key ways: firstly, and most fundamentally, Relativity's alliance with Sony and Universal respectively was purely financial, having pooled funding from hedge-fund backers into funds dubbed Gun Hill Road I and Gun Hill Road II (LaPorte and Snyder, 2006). Secondly, Legendary was widely reported to have enjoyed relative freedom over the films they financed, whereas Relativity was only allowed to pick from a selection provided by the studios, and from which key franchises were notably omitted (Snyder, 2006; Owczarski, 2012). While I have already questioned the validity of Legendary's "freedom" to choose from the Warner slate, it is of no doubt that they were involved in some of Warner's key franchises from the start. Though *Batman Begins* (2005) marked the reboot of a franchise that took the brand in a different direction and therefore presented a risk that Warner will have wanted to mitigate. *Batman* is one of Warner's most lucrative franchises, as is *Superman*, which was the second film that Legendary and Warner co-financed. Throughout their partnership with Warner (between 2005 and 2014), Legendary partnered on thirteen of Warner's top thirty box office grossing films (see Appendix A), and their collaborations include two of the four most successful Warner Bros. films (*The Dark Knight* (2008) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) in 2nd and 4th place respectively). It should be noted that Legendary did not receive a producing credit on the theatrical release of *Batman Begins* but did receive a producing credit on

the DVD release (McClintock, 2005b). Though no official reason has been given for this it is conceivably due to the overlap of time between the film's release and the Legendary deal; *Batman Begins* premiered in Tokyo on May 31st 2005, and opened globally on the 15th, 16th and 17th of June 2005 (IMDb, 2018a) while the deal with Legendary was not announced until June 21st 2005 (Warner Bros., 2005a). Relativity, meanwhile, enjoyed success with Sony and Universal on some of their earlier partnerships but among those the studios respective key franchises were absent, most notably *Spider-Man*, *James Bond* films, and *Resident Evil* from Sony and the *Despicable Me* and *Jurassic Park* franchises from Universal. However, following a new arrangement in 2008 in which Relativity agreed to co-finance 75% of Universal's slate (Garrett, 2008b), the company started to become involved in some of the studio's more lucrative products, such as the *Fast and Furious* franchise. In 2009 Relativity purchased the production studio Rogue, previously a subsidiary of Universal, and thus started in the production and distribution business (Cieply, 2009). Relativity was described in *The Hollywood Reporter* as making 'a remarkable transition into a quasi-studio' through the acquisition of distribution rights (to Rogue films) (Zeitchik, 2008). This move brought with it control over release dates and P&A costs, but was somewhat limited by tying the company to the specific genre-films that Rogue was famous for (Zeitchik, 2008), which were not synonymous with the Relativity filmography up to that point, unlike Legendary who had established their brand (high concept, commercial "fanboy-fare") from the start.

Another company likened to Legendary at the time was Village Roadshow, which started life as a drive-in cinema operator in 1954 in Australia before transitioning into film distribution and, ultimately, production (Goldsmith, O'Regan & Ward, 2010) and had been responsible for the distribution of Warner Bros. films since 1971 (Karon, 1997; Woods, 2000). In the late 1980s Warner Bros. bought fifty percent of Village and distributed a selection of their products in the U.S. (Goldsmith, O'Regan & Ward, 2010). The two companies had also partnered on exporting their films overseas and even constructing theme parks and cinema multiplexes in Australia (Karon, 1997; Woods,

2000). In 1997 Village and Warner Bros. announced a plan to co-finance, co-produce and co-exhibit a slate of twenty films over a five-year period (Karon, 1997; Woods, 2000). This renders the much touted “unprecedented scale” of the Legendary-Warner twenty-five film slate deal less unprecedented. However, at the time of entering into their production partnership with Warner Bros. in 1997, Village had been a successful film production studio in its own right as well as an established distributor and exhibitor for more than forty-five years, not to mention Warner Bros. already owned a fifty percent share in the company. Legendary had no such experience nor any preceding connection and was, for all intents and purposes, an “independent” company. Thus, despite their similarities, the two deals cannot be compared and the unprecedented nature of Legendary’s deal with Warner Bros. is perhaps better framed in relation to the justification of the scale of the deal in light of their relative inexperience. This strengthens the argument that the relationship was purely financial.

Legendary Releases in China 2005 - 2010

The previous chapter outlined Warner Bros.’ long history of connections with China and the resulting inroads that were presented to Legendary through their association with Warner Bros. It is the purpose of this chapter to examine the films released by Legendary and Warner Bros. between 2005 and 2010 with particular attention to those that received distribution in China, as it reveals much about the Legendary China-strategy and the first phase of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship. At the start of the Legendary-Warner Bros. deal in 2005 Legendary only released one film, *Batman Begins*, which was one of only eighteen U.S. films released in China that year. Though *Batman Begins* only took just over \$1 million in China (the third worst performer among the U.S. films released in China that year (*Box Office Mojo*)), it is worth remembering that the Chinese market was significantly underdeveloped at this time (see: Li, 2010; Katz, 2008; Zhu and Nakajima, 2010) with respect to the number of cinema screens,

domestic film output and cinema attendance figures. Increased numbers of multiplexes and an expanding middle class in following years contributed to a dramatic increase in the Chinese market. Wang (2010: 73) notes that power in late capitalist expansions, such as China, can be measured by the capacity 'to overcome constraints of both space and time'. Through the development of digital technology facilitating the streaming and release of films and speeding up the delay between the premiere release of a film and its Chinese release, the market was opened up significantly. In this regard China began to develop a more meaningful engagement with the global film industry. This engagement was, however, extremely complicated by the continual negotiation - political, cultural and economic - between China and the U.S. Specifically for Hollywood, the opening up of the Chinese film market was problematised by political regulations and cultural norms that included import restrictions and opaque (for Hollywood) censorship practices. The Legendary releases during this time encapsulate some of the techniques used by Hollywood during this period to navigate two significant unknowns: the Chinese market and the Chinese government's film policies. Legendary's releases in China between 2005 and 2010 also exemplify the nature of the first phase of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship and the lead up to the second phase (which will be covered in chapter two). Specifically, Legendary's releases in China during this time do not do anything "China-special", while the Chinese box office revenue for those films release increases significantly (thanks to the industrial and political changes during this time as detailed in the introduction and which will be further discussed later in this chapter), thus leading to the change in Legendary's strategy to focus more intently on the Chinese film market in the second phase of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship.

Superman Returns (2006) was the second Warner Bros. project to be co-financed by Legendary, and it, too, received a Chinese release, this time securing \$8 million in box office returns from the Chinese market, making it the eighth most profitable U.S. film from the thirty-one U.S. films released in China that year (2006) (*Box Office Mojo*). In

2006, Legendary “partnered” with Warner Bros. on five additional releases, none of which received a theatrical release in China. Around this time only twenty revenue-sharing foreign films were allowed into China, and slots in the quota were highly coveted. Slots were assigned according to a myriad of factors, including their “suitability”, which, among other things, involved passing the country’s strict censorship rules. Censorship has been a defining obstacle for the release of foreign films in China for decades. Practices of censorship were first introduced in September 1928 following the establishment of the Nanjing government, with the issuing of thirteen censorship regulations (Zhang, 2004; Xiao, 1997). These rules were a direct response to the overwhelmingly negative portrayal of Chinese characters and the Chinese nation in Hollywood films and the roots of censorship in China were forged from a will to protect audiences from racism and ‘humiliation’ (Xiao, 1997: 41). Censorship provisions were initiated by the film industry and the film-going public, not the government, who simply responded. Following political changes and diplomatic discussions in the 1970s, the barrier to trade began to lessen and the China Film Group Corporation was established in 1979 as the only body to be able to authorise the importation of foreign films and, later, co-productions (Geltzer, 2017; Zhang, 2004). Since that time the ease of access between Hollywood and China has been moulded by economic reforms and political events, exemplified by its restriction following the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 and the forced relaxation of import rules following China’s re-entry to the WTO. Despite intensified economic reform in the 1980s, underinvestment, competition from commercialised television, a thriving market for pirated videos, and a fragmentation of audience and market put a tremendous strain on the domestic film industry (Zhao, 2008). This led to a sharp decline in the national box office, which led in turn to the substantial financial losses of state-owned studios. Prevailing debts and costs incumbent on film production intensified economic strains and brought studios to the brink of bankruptcy. Hollywood imports were seen as the most ‘feasible solution’ to this problem and in 1994 the Film Bureau approved a plan to import ten revenue-sharing films per year, specifically ‘blockbusters that had already achieved good box office records

overseas' (Su, 2016: 15). China was hoping to achieve the highest possible return on the fewest number of Hollywood imports. This is particularly interesting because, while certain films will undoubtedly have been omitted from consideration where the film's content is in direct contravention of censorship rules, it also reveals a link between the Chinese market and the global market; China was using overseas box office performance as a key indicator of whether the film would receive a Chinese release. In 2006, the Film Bureau issued further reforms under a new guiding principle that all film imports should serve China's national interests and goals (Song, 2018). This would remain relatively unchanged until when in 2016 a Chinese Film Production Law was passed (SAPPRFT, 2016) which enacted content prohibitions based largely around nationalistic sentiment. According to the Law, films must not: endanger national unity; harm national dignity, honour or interest; belittle "exceptional ethnic cultural traditions"; violate ethnic customs; distort ethnic history or ethnic historical figures; injure ethnic sentiments or undermine ethnic unity; incite the undermining of national religious policy, advocate cults or superstitions; endanger social morality; disturb social order, undermine social stability; promote pornography, gambling, drug use, violence, or terror; instigate crimes or impart criminal methods (SAPPRFT, 2016). These stipulations are consistent with the taboo subjects that were introduced in the Film Censorship Statute, China's earliest film censorship guidelines, which seemed to include (since no formal rules existed):

scenes that showed China as a backward country and her people as an uncivilised race, scenes in which the Chinese appeared as villains, as morally corrupt (smoking opium and gambling), or even as servants, and dialogue that ridiculed the Chinese and the Chinese way of life or referring to the Chinese in a less than respectable way (Xiao, 1997: 42).

However, the opacity of these terms and the inconsistency with which they were applied appear to allow enough ambiguity to enable censors to exclude with ease and make it extremely difficult for Hollywood to gauge what is or is not acceptable in the eyes of China's censors. This is largely to do with 'ever-shifting political winds' but also determined by whimsy (Landreth, 2016). A film that resembles a film that has already been allowed into the country might still not get through, such as in the case of *Deadpool*

(2016), which was denied access on the basis of the amount of violence it contained, when domestic film *Mr Six* (2015), which many consider to be more violent, was allowed through (Canaves, 2016; Landreth, 2016). Meanwhile the popular Chinese blockbuster *Monster Hunt* (*Zhuō Yāo Jì*) (2015) received an R-rating in the U.S. (Canaves, 2016). The reasons for this opacity and inconsistency might be explained by the multitude of concerns and purposes of Chinese censorship. Censorship happens at two main levels: the censorship board (cutting scenes that are subject to the censorship rules) and self-censorship (i.e. pre-empting the censorship board). This includes ensuring films do not negatively portray Chinese culture and society and do not promote Western models of society that feature individualism (Richeri, 2016). Censorship of films in China is multifaceted; acting as a way of controlling what cinema goers see so as to incentivise nationalistic sentiment and discourage the offensive, anti-Chinese themes in films. In addition to censorship, the Chinese government also controls the Chinese film market using blackout periods that are designed to protect the domestic industry. Part of the issue lies in the values and ideology of the Chinese government as stark in contrast with the values and ideology of Hollywood. Historically, the difference between the Chinese and U.S. political cultures has imbued a cross-cultural misunderstanding. However, it can be argued that in recent years - ever more increasingly since China adopted Deng Xiaoping's socialist market economy - the difference between the North American and Chinese cultural norms is dissipating. This is entirely a consequence of China's "opening up" to the world, and of the availability of communication technology. As a result, this stands to put Chinese cultural norms at odds with Chinese government policy, which is why it is imperative for the state to control these developments in order to maintain control over the populace. Moreover, this shows one of the fundamental inconsistencies between Chinese communism and Chinese capitalism.

The trade presses have noted that people across both U.S. and Chinese film industries have been calling for a ratings system to allow for more content to be produced (Ryan, 2016a). Parents complain that they are confronted by inappropriate material when

taking their children to the cinema, Chinese and American filmmakers lament the need to restrain themselves and decry the use of opaque censorship rules as reasons to keep out unwanted films, which has prompted delegates and representatives of China's legislative sessions to lobby in vain for such a system to be included in the Film Promotion Law 2016 (Ryan, 2016a). Seemingly innocuous themes and scenes can cause offence such as in the case of *Mission: Impossible III* (2006) where a scene was cut because it showed laundry hanging from windows in Shanghai apartment buildings, which Chinese censors saw as harmful to China's image (Landreth, 2016; Kokas, 2017), since Shanghai is considered one of the most modern cities in the world, images of dirty laundry undermined that reputation. In the same film, further scenes were omitted in which elderly Chinese characters were shown playing mah-jong while the main character's (Ethan Hunt played by Tom Cruise) wife was held hostage in the next room and in another scene where Hunt kills a Chinese henchman, both cut because they were considered insulting (CBC Arts, 2006). These issues highlight some of the key obstacles preventing Hollywood films from entering China: cultural protectionism, ambiguity in the censorship process, and national sensitivities. These obstacles also characterise the first period in the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship.

The relationship between Legendary and Warner Bros. reportedly became strained following the failures of *Lady In The Water* (2006) and *The Ant Bully* (2006) (Barnes, 2007). This tension was likely soothed by the new round of financing secured by Legendary in 2007, with a further investment of \$1 billion (Barnes, 2007). In 2008, Legendary partnered with Warner Bros. on two releases; *10,000 BC* (2008) and *The Dark Knight*. Though it was only *10,000 BC* to receive a Chinese release, both films are significant. *10,000 BC* was the eighth most profitable U.S. film to be released in China in 2008, the same position as *Superman Returns* the year before, but taking nearly \$3 million more than the latter (*Box Office Mojo*). *The Dark Knight*, meanwhile, did not apply for a Chinese release date, nor submit the film to Chinese government censors, due to what the studio described as 'pre-release conditions' and 'cultural sensitivities'

(McNary, 2008). Warner Bros. declined to comment further, but these sensitivities are likely to have alluded to a storyline in which a criminal mastermind is captured in Hong Kong, a Chinese territory, where the shooting also took place (McNary, 2008). By controlling the representation of Chinese people, culture and landmarks, the Chinese censorship board are doing two things: “saving face” by protecting their image and disavowing the behaviour or content therein. Many of the rules of the censorship process pertain to censoring imitable behaviour. One of the biggest concerns for the Chinese government is controlling a population of the size of China’s. By limiting - or censoring - Chinese audiences’ exposure to imitable behaviour they are, in theory, lessening the risk of that behaviour being imitated. One of the paradoxes of Chinese film censorship is that films that are censored or banned frequently appear on the bootleg market. Interestingly, it was also in 2008 that Warner Bros. left the Chinese Home Video market, despite having paved the way in 2004, and having provided DVDs at prices that competed with pirated copies, even distributing films made by rival Hollywood studios including Universal and Paramount. The studio withdrew as a result of a lack of financial success (Kokas, 2017; Wang, 2010).

In 2009, Legendary released five titles with Warner Bros., and none of them received a Chinese release. This is unsurprising since four out of the five films received R-ratings from the MPAA. *Watchmen* (2009) was given an R-rating in the U.S. for its ‘strong graphic violence, sexuality, nudity and language’, (IMDb, 2018h) it is therefore not surprising that the film did not receive a Chinese release and is unlikely to even have been considered. Similarly, *Ninja Assassin* (2009) also received a R-rating, the MPAA citing ‘strong bloody stylised violence throughout, and language’ (IMDb, 2018i). *The Hangover* (2009) is likely to have also been discounted due to its adult content, for which it received an R-rating from the MPAA who cited ‘pervasive language, sexual content including nudity, and some drug material’ as the reasoning (IMDb, 2018j). Similarly, *Observe and Report* (2009), was rated R for ‘pervasive language, graphic nudity, drug use, sexual content and violence’ (IMDb, 2018k). The only Legendary project released in

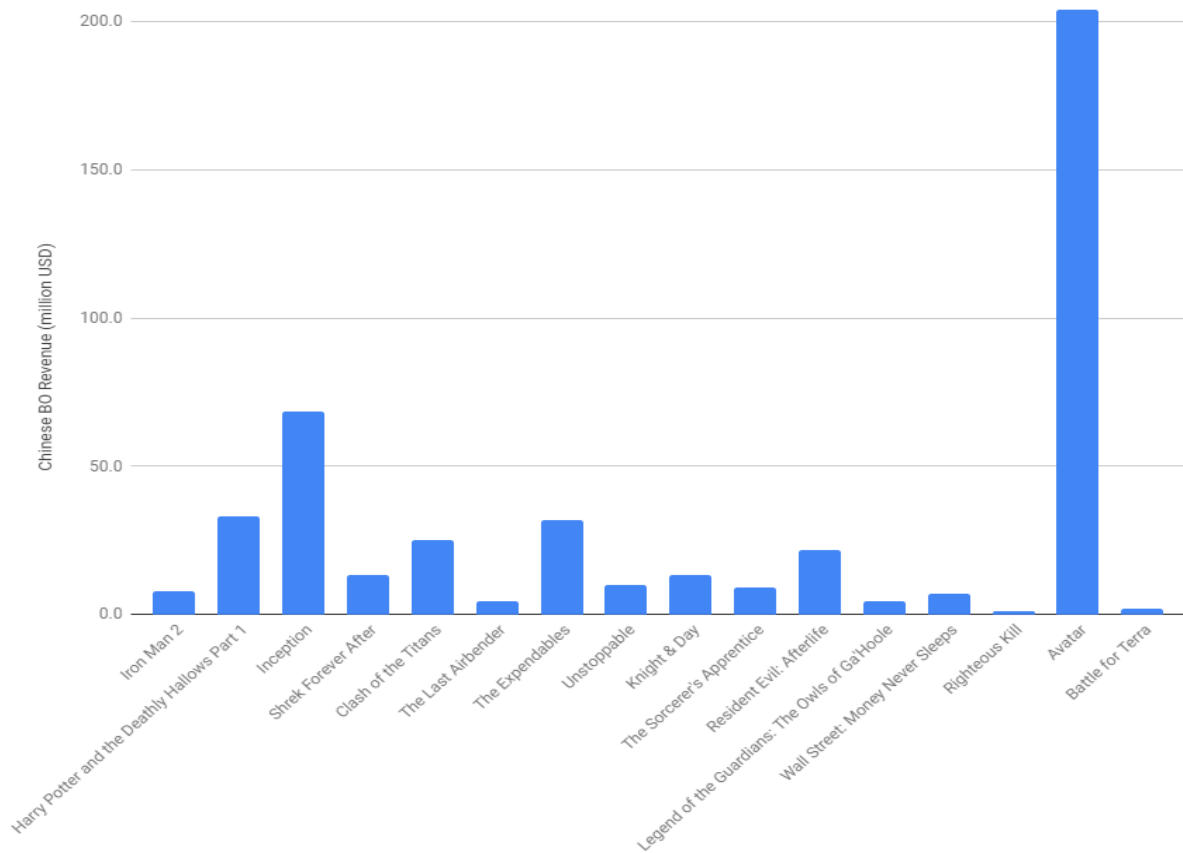
2009 that did not receive an R-rating was *Where the Wild Things Are* (2009), an adaptation of a children's book (Sendak, 1963). Despite this being a film for children and receiving a PG rating by the MPAA, the film did not receive a Chinese release. Indeed, the book had not at that time received a Chinese-language publication. Writing about the acquisition of simplified Chinese-language rights to Maurice Sendak's work, Leonard Marcus (2018) questioned whether the book itself would have ever made it past the government censors owing to the story's 'rebellious child hero'. This rebellious hero may have been one of the reasons for the film not securing a Chinese release but it should also be noted that the film highlighted dark tones already present in the book, with some critics suggesting it was inappropriate viewing for children and, in a departure from the book, sees the hero run away from home to pursue his ambition to become 'king of the wild things' (Thorpe and Asthana, 2009).

The following year, Legendary released five films with Warner Bros., two of which received a Chinese release: *Clash of the Titans* (2010) and *Inception* (2010). During this time Legendary released a large number of R-rated films, indicating that they were interested in producing graphic, risqué films, following a similar trend to Miramax, however this put the films at odds with China's content prohibition guidelines. It should be noted that *The Expendables* (2010) and *Resident Evil: Afterlife* (2010) both received a theatrical release in China despite receiving an R-rating. This highlights a paradox of Chinese film censorship which Clarence Tsui describes as 'restricted content, unrestricted access', referring to the method of cutting violent scenes from violent films but ignoring the inadvertent adult content and leading, ultimately, to an 'arbitrariness' of the censorship system (Tsui, 2017). The decisions made by SAPPRFT have been regarded as opaque by foreign filmmakers and are not predictably applied. In a research report for the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission in 2015, the authors make reference to Zhang Yimou's *The Flowers of War* (*Jīnlíng Shísān Chāi*) (2011) which 'graphically portrayed the Nanking massacre with scenes depicting overt and sexual content. But because the film stoked anti-Japanese sentiment and was regarded

as China's top contender for an Oscar, it passed Chinese censors easily' (O'Connor and Armstrong, 2015).

Clash of the Titans was released in mid-April and achieved a Chinese box office of \$24.56 million, just shy of the \$25 million grossed by *Iron Man 2* (2010) in the following month (Screen, 2010). *Inception*, however, which was released in September - a traditionally slow time for Chinese cinema owing to students returning to school following summer breaks - and two and a half months since its wide global release, shocked industry analysts by achieving the fourth biggest opening by a foreign film at that time, behind *Avatar* (2009), *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (2009) and *Transformers* (2007) respectively (The Independent, 2010). According to data from *Box Office Mojo*, *Inception* was the second highest grossing U.S. import that year, more than doubling the take of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1* (2010), which came in 3rd place (see Fig 1.2 and Appendix B). The success of *Avatar* revealed the behemoth potential of the Chinese market and *Inception* followed suit, though not quite as impressively (see Figs. 1.3 and 1.4). The dramatic increase in Hollywood film box office revenues in China at this time is down to a multitude of factors, paramount among them the rapid growth of cinemas. The retreat of companies like Warner Bros. International Cinemas (WBIC) following the ownership disputes in the mid '00s, caused the Chinese multiplex development to slow. In December 2009 the Chinese Film Bureau state department announced a policy to subsidise cinema businesses in small to mid-sized cities designed to facilitate 'rapid growth' of cinemas, and to contribute towards a boost in the development of cinemas in China's 2nd and 3rd tier cities (EntGroup, 2010). The multiplex real estate boom would be perhaps the most defining contributing factor to the transition from the first phase of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship to the second (which will be discussed in chapter two).

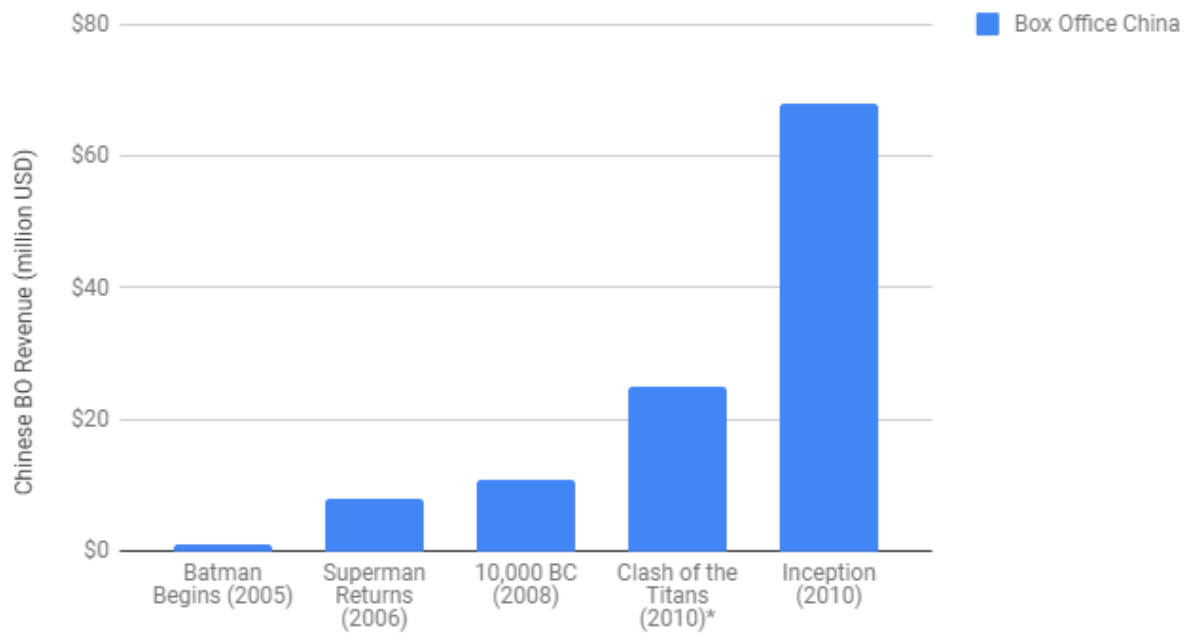
Fig. 1.2: Box Office Revenue of U.S. Films in China in 2010.



(Source: *Box Office Mojo* except *Clash of the Titans* *Source: Screen Staff, 2010)

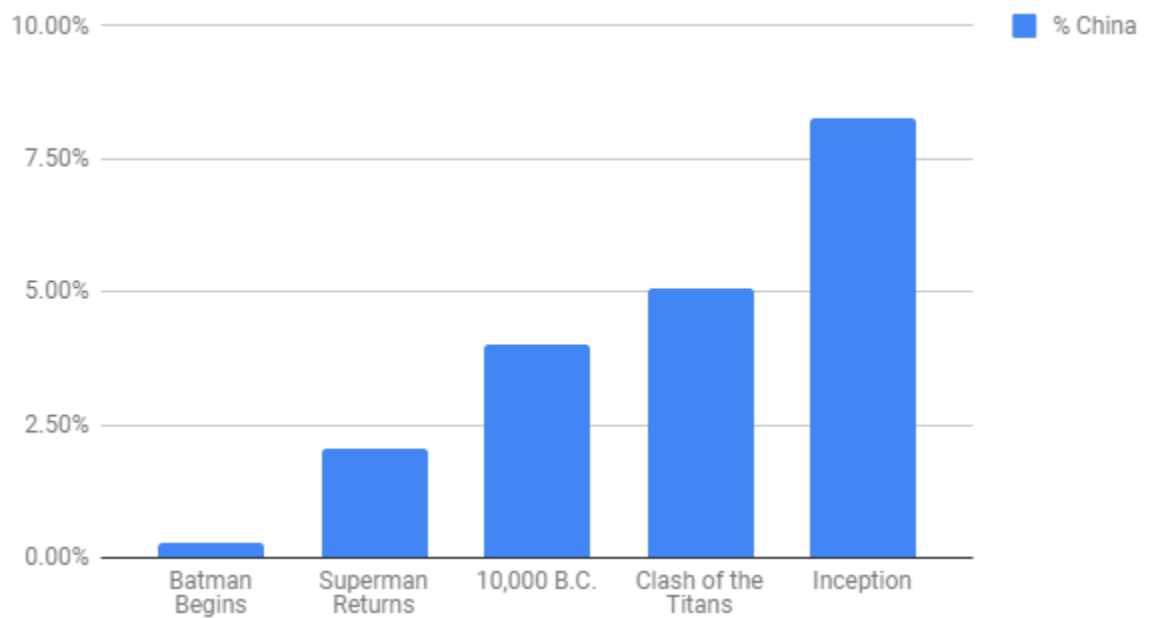
The increase in the Chinese box office revenue of Legendary films between 2005 and 2010 shows a clear pattern of consistent and sizeable increase (see Fig. 1.3). The percentage of the box office yield from China also shows the same pattern (see Fig. 1.4).

Fig. 1.3: Box Office Performance of Legendary Films in China between 2005-2010.



(Source: *Box Office Mojo*) (*Source: Screen Staff, 2010)

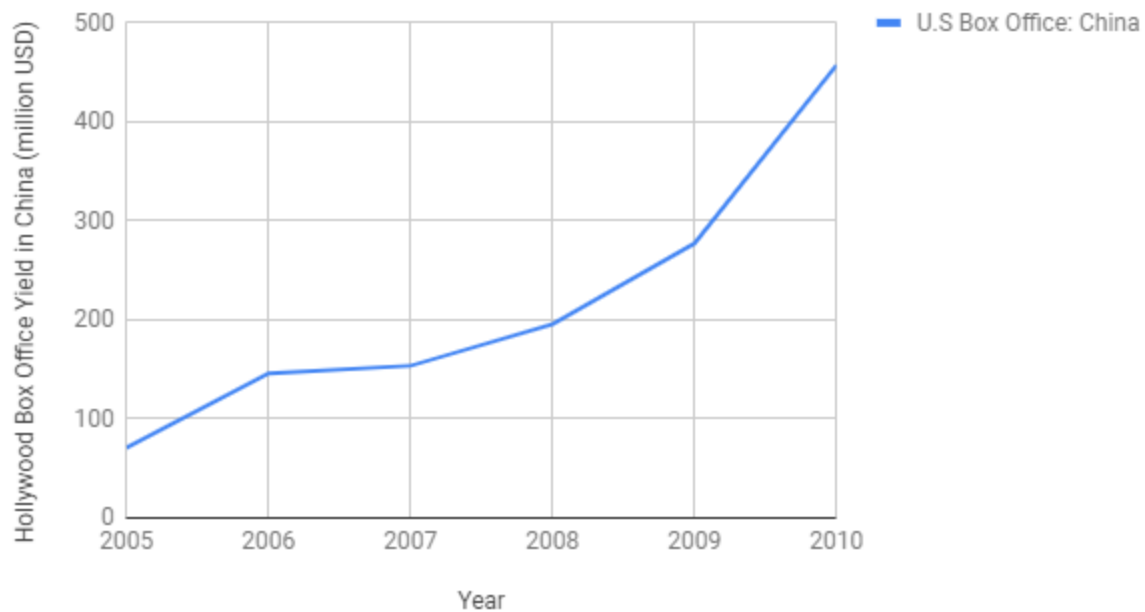
Fig. 1.4: Percentage of Legendary Films' Box Office Earned in Chinese Market between 2005-2010.



(Source: *Box Office Mojo*) (*Source: Screen Staff, 2010)

Legendary's increasing success in China is indicative of several related factors. Perhaps most importantly, they represented the wider increase in box office revenue in China as a result of the cinema multiplex boom. Legendary's releases in China during this period also all fall into the category of high concept, enhanced format films, which are generally popular in China. Jillian Share (2018) noted in her interview; 'I think that [Legendary's] movies naturally worked in China'. As pointed out by the High Ranking Industry Person (2018), 'The visual, spectacle movie plays well in China, in general'. It is also important to recognise that high concept, commercial films were, and are, popular on a global scale and commonly dominate the box office so, it does not necessarily represent a "China strategy" so much as a "global strategy", and one in line with all Hollywood studios. As the same the High Ranking Industry Person (2018) notes, 'People realised that most of Legendary's films that were doing well in China were doing so without doing anything "China special", the movie just clicked'. Rather than the film 'just clicking' it was an example of the effective post-postclassical model Legendary employed with its focus on enhanced format, visual effects spectacles. This also demonstrates the effectiveness of post-postclassical Hollywood's global focus; film franchises that are built on existing intellectual property and on the principles of branding work well in the global market. Thus, it is no surprise that Legendary - a post-postclassical studio making post-postclassical films - enjoyed success in the Chinese film market. Legendary may not have been doing anything "China-special" - a concept that will be interrogated in chapter two - but their globally-minded post-postclassical approach worked well in China. It is also important to contextualise Legendary's success in the Chinese market as in line with the overall upwards trend in increased box office revenue for U.S. films in China (see fig. 1.5). The success or failure of a film in terms of box office performance involves many more considerations than just the number itself. For example, where the data is coming from, the marketing strategies adopted, the release date, and the wider industrial and political contexts must be considered in order to fully appreciate Legendary's performance.

Fig. 1.5: Box Office Yield of U.S. Films in China 2005-2010



(Sources: *Box Office Mojo*; *Screen Staff* 2010)

The first phase of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship (1994-2010), which encompasses the Legendary releases in China between 2005 and 2010, is situated within the political economic setting described in the introduction to this thesis, wherein China was struggling to maintain domestic control while opening up to the global marketplace and Hollywood was increasingly global-minded and seeking new audiences and new investors. The increase in Chinese box office for Legendary films up to 2010 signifies the emergence and rapid growth of China's film market and Legendary's (and Hollywood's) resulting shift towards more carefully considering China as an export market for Hollywood films and as a potential site of investors. This dramatic shift precipitated the transition from the first phase of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship to the second precisely because the rapid increase of Chinese cinemas and Chinese audience figures made it prudent if not essential for Hollywood studios to start considering a "China-special" strategy. Legendary's own China strategy arguably started with the investment partnership formed with Orange Sky Golden Harvest.

Orange Sky Golden Harvest

In order to situate Legendary's China-strategy in context, it is essential to consider the wider political and sociological events that were taking place during the years 2005-2010, which also characterise the first period in the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship. During this period there were several significant landmarks, punctuated by the ongoing WTO dispute between China and the U.S. and including America's "pivot" to Asia policy. China's entering the WTO in 2001 was intended to remove or loosen the trade barriers between China and the world, and Hollywood studios saw it as an indication that barriers to the Chinese film market would relax accordingly. However, the negotiation and implementation of these changes was deemed less than adequate. In 2007 the U.S. filed a suit with the WTO, accusing China of being in violation of international trade rules. In 2008, the U.S. plummeted into a financial crisis. America's economic decline at this time was seen as a weakening of their power and the U.S. hegemony appeared under threat, which in turn inspired China to become more confident (Christensen, 2015). At the same time, the Chinese government was concerned that the financial crisis may present a threat to domestic stability as it negatively affected their export markets and thus the stability of long-standing authoritarian regimes (Christensen, 2015). This posed a threat to China's social and economic stability, on top of which the economic stimulus plan announced by the State Council of the PRC to minimise the impact of the financial crash only fed into wealth imbalance, corruption and misguided, inflated real estate and infrastructure structure problems (Christensen, 2015).

Following the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan, the U.S. was declared to be at what Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (2009) referred to as a 'pivot point'. It was Clinton's belief that the smart and systematic plan was to 'pivot' attention to Asia, in

order to ‘sustain U.S. leadership, secure U.S. interests, and advance U.S. values’ (Clinton, 2009). Clinton’s work on the “pivot to Asia” was intended as a policy addressing the realignment of U.S. strategy and focus following their withdrawal from the Middle East (Li, 2016). However, by this time, Beijing had established a critical role in global supply chains, based on their dramatically increased economic influence (Christensen, 2015) and as such was enjoying a renewed national confidence and critics of the “pivot” to China had reason to dispute the idea that China “needed” the U.S. in the ways the pivot document describes. Moreover, given the rebalance of power between the two nations, the claims made by the document could be seen as offensive. Many Chinese saw it as a containment policy aimed at China (Jin, 2016), despite Obama’s assertions otherwise (Allen, 2009). China reacted strongly to Clinton’s ideas; Li (2016) calls it an ‘overreaction’ that consequently pushed the U.S. into a defensive position. As a result the U.S. adopted tough stances on a series of Chinese initiatives, which only served to further complicate and escalate misunderstandings between the nations (Li, 2016). The Obama administration suffered from these entrenched and ongoing misunderstandings and false perceptions that hindered developments and complicated issues (Li, 2016). The Asia “pivot” only served to aggravate the trust deficit, which can be seen as China misinterpreting U.S. actions as attempts to contain them and that the U.S. considers every Chinese action as a ‘challenge to its preeminent position’ (Li, 2016). Li (2016) claims that policies and assumptions were made by both sides, based on extreme views and conspiracy theories. Christensen believes that the main obstacle in the ‘China challenge’ is one of mistrust in which ‘overblown American rhetoric’ fuels Chinese fears of containment and feelings of being misunderstood (Christensen, 2015: 323). When considering the relationship’s history of anti-foreignism, along with their polarising views on democracy and human rights, it’s easy to see why Chinese critics and officials might have had serious concerns regarding the U.S. making China the focus of their ‘diplomacy strategy’.

The Legendary filmography can be viewed up until this point as an experimental trajectory, testing the water across different genres, production scales and marketing strategies. Following a series of successes and failures a more robust Legendary strategy began to take form and, in light of developments in the Chinese market and the success of films like *Inception* and *Avatar*, this strategy became more China-focused. Legendary's China-focus is most notably evidenced in the connections made with Orange Sky Golden Harvest, which laid the groundwork for the formation of Legendary East, which will be discussed in chapter three.

In September 2010, Thomas Tull set in motion a takeover of Legendary by acquiring nearly all of the shares held by the original investors who financed the founding of the company in 2004 (Fritz, 2010a; Graser and Abrams, 2011c). The trade press claimed that the takeover was motivated by Tull's desire to move beyond financing, to focus more on producing and expanding into video games and digital media (Fritz, 2010a; Graser and Abrams, 2011; Abrams, 2011c). As part of the takeover deal, Tull brought on two new investors: Fidelity Investments and Fortress Investment Group (Fritz, 2010a; Graser and Abrams, 2011c; Garrahan, 2010). An article in *Variety* noted that securing the investments necessary was only made possible due to the resurgence of interest in Hollywood by financiers, following the scale back in the recession (Graser and Abrams, 2011; Abrams, 2011c). Legendary's record of producing marquee franchises and its distribution deal with Warner Bros. was designed to, and succeeded in, making the company an attractive investment prospect.

Around the same time as Tull engineered his takeover, Legendary made a significant step in their China strategy by partnering with Orange Sky Golden Harvest Entertainment (OSGH), a private Hong Kong film company. OSGH was founded in 2005 by Wu Kebo and started life as a production and distribution company known as Chengtian. In 2008 Chengtian bought the majority share of Hong Kong's Golden Harvest Entertainment (Cremin, 2008; EntGroup, 2010). Golden Harvest was itself founded in

1970 by Raymond Chow, who had recently left his post as head of publicity and production chief at Shaw Brothers (Chu, 2003). In its first year, Golden Harvest produced three Bruce Lee films, the success of which propelled the studio to rival Shaw Brothers, and, significantly, made a name for themselves overseas as well as domestically (Chu, 2003). By the mid 1970's Golden Harvest was the dominant film production company in Hong Kong, as well as the primary exhibitor in Hong Kong, in partnership with Cathay, and began to set up their own exhibition chain overseas (Chu, 2003). In the 1980s Golden Harvest became the primary distributor of U.S. films in Hong Kong territories, and also acted as a financier on some U.S. films (Chu, 2003). Golden Harvest suffered financial losses in the late 1990s as a result of the Asian financial crisis (Chu, 2003) prompting the studio to shift its focus from production to exhibition as owner of the cinema circuit, Golden Harvest Cinemas (Shackleton, 2011). After Chengtian bought the majority stake in 2008, the newly named Orange Sky Golden Harvest began investing in multiplex developments and acquisitions in Mainland China in early 2009 (EntGroup, 2010). OSGH was able to use its ties between its production and distribution arms and its exhibition arms to gain more screenings for its films (EntGroup, 2010), making it a formidable company for Legendary to form a strategic alliance with. The deal between Legendary and OSGH was significant because it was the first publicly disclosed strategic investment in the company (Fritz, 2010b) and it was also the first time a Chinese entertainment company had bought a stake in a Hollywood firm (Landreth, 2010). According to a statement released by OSGH, the partnership, which saw OSGH acquire a 3.33% investment in Legendary for \$25 million, had multiple purposes, paramount among them to explore possibilities for co-productions for the Chinese market, and to help Legendary 'extend its foothold' in China (Orange Sky Golden Harvest Entertainment Limited, 2010). In a statement to the trade press, Tull called the partnership a 'strategic investment', adding; 'The transaction is part of an effort to explore broader partnership opportunities in China and beyond' (Tull in Landreth, 2010). The regulatory filing also provided OSGH with the right to appoint a representative of the studio to sit on Legendary's board of six directors (Fritz, 2010b; Shackleton, 2011), and consequently

Kelvin Wu was appointed to the board (Fritz, 2011b). However, OSGH sold their stake in Legendary a year later (Shackleton, 2011), ending the partnership without having produced any concluded deals or projects. According to the trade press, the partnership ended because the two companies were not strategically aligned; with OSGH focused on exhibition rather than production, and Legendary focused on production (Coonan, 2011a). However, this explanation does not appear to make sense considering nothing had changed since the start of the deal. According to *Variety*, Legendary reimbursed OSGH's \$25 million investment with an additional \$5 million in settlement (Coonan, 2011a). Perhaps a more plausible explanation for the termination of the partnership was that the financial resolution helped 'establish a dollar value' for Legendary (Frater, 2016a). As a private company, Legendary's business valuation had not yet been established. By establishing a financial value for OSGH's minority stake, an overall estimated value for the company was made possible.

Tull's new position as majority stakeholder gave him more control over strategic decisions which, as well as expanding into new media, also involved the process of moving away from co-finance and towards becoming an independent studio (Fritz, 2011b). Once Tull had the increased control, he started to seek new financing, this time looking to raise 'up to \$900 million' to pursue his 'big-picture plans for Legendary', according to trade press reports (Graser and Abrams, 2011). The next chapter will explore the impact this had on the Legendary strategy, with a focus on the significant China-connections that followed in 2011, as well as the increased strain that Legendary's focus on producing placed on their relationship with Warner Bros.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed Legendary's formation, situating it as an example of post-postclassical Hollywood. I have shown how Tull's image was constructed through the

trade press as a fanboy-producer/auteur and have shown how that image was beneficial to the Legendary strategy. The construction of Tull and the attributes that were associated with his persona were important to the building of the Legendary brand and the securing of investment. Contrary to the characterisation of Legendary in the trade press, which referred to the company as Warner Bros.' co-production partner, the company was a financier rather than a producer. In her assessment of the role of the "indie" producer, Sherry Ortner (2013: 147) foregrounds the 'creative contributions' inherent to the role. Whereas a producer is a role associated with the filmmaking process, a financier is not a creative role, but rather a reminder of the economics of the film industry. The reality of Legendary as a financier therefore further complicates the image of the company as a fanboy-producer and creative hub. However, the motive for this branding was in keeping with the ethos of post-postclassical Hollywood wherein financier, producer, studio and film are conflated for the purposes of synergistic branding.

This chapter has addressed the terms of the deal between Legendary and Warner Bros., to situate them within the wider industrial context. I have argued that Legendary was a financier (with aspirations to produce) and not a producer in its collaboration with Warner Bros. Furthermore, this chapter has analysed the ways in which Legendary's connection with Warner Bros. served to influence and support their China-focus. I have shown how, by partnering with Warner Bros., Legendary was able to enter the industry attached to Warner's experience, extensive networks and distribution chains. Warner Bros., by comparison, benefitted from Legendary's continual sourcing of finance, as well as the financial rewards from the successes of Legendary's in-house productions. This chapter has established Legendary as an example of the increased hedge fund financing that entered Hollywood at this time, but has differentiated Legendary from these funds, showing how Legendary demonstrated what Jeffrey Ulin describes as a hedge fund 'morphing into independent producers masquerading as would-be mini-majors' (2013: 106) and was in fact a "financier with benefits". With Tull at the helm, the company was

branded as an independent producer rather than a financier. This also demonstrated the industrial trend identified by Sherry Ortner (2013: 292) that the position of producers in the industry is largely misunderstood, undervalued and even disrespected because of the proliferation of producer credits that get ‘handed out’ to financiers, managers and other executives not involved in the task of producing. This complicated understanding of the role of the producer is also an example of a shift to post-postclassical Hollywood where producers, just like films and studios, are managed and dictated by branding. The films Legendary “chose” to release with Warner Bros. during this time have been examined with particular attention paid to whether they obtained a Chinese release. Moreover, this filmography identifies a Legendary strategy, from which a China-strategy emerges. I have identified the early signs of Legendary’s China-focus as being part of a much wider trend, buoyed by industrial, political and economic developments in the Chinese film industry and in wider Sino-U.S. relations that characterised this phase of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship. The early signs of this China-strategy, specifically the deal with Orange Sky Golden Harvest, have been examined and have paved the way for the next chapter, in which Legendary’s strategy will come into full focus. Finally, Thomas Tull’s takeover in late-2010 has been addressed; this, too, has sought to underline a significant shift in ownership and thus, strategy, which will be the focus of the next chapter. Speaking about Legendary’s formation at its beginnings Thomas Tull said, ‘we got a ticket to the ballgame. That’s it. Now, we need to make things work’ (Tull in McClintock, 2005a). The next chapter addresses the strategies employed by Legendary between 2005 and 2010 to do just this, using Douglas Gomery’s (2005) industrial analysis techniques to analyse their economic conduct and takes a political economy approach to situate Legendary within wider industrial trends.

Chapter 2

Phase Two of the Contemporary Hollywood-China Relationship: “China-special” (2011-2015)

The chapter covers the second phase of my periodisation of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship. I define the second phase, taking place between 2011-2015, as the “China-special” period, during which the major Hollywood studios were increasingly invested in creating content that would appeal to a Chinese audience and the quest for the Hollywood-China co-production began. *The Karate Kid* (2010) was the first notable collaboration between a Hollywood studio - Sony - and a Chinese company - China Film Group Corporation. The China-special period is thus named because it is during this period that Hollywood studios experimented with “China-special” strategies, including Chinese elements in films (Chinese characters, settings, and cultural themes) and marketing to Chinese audiences (reducing release windows between China and the U.S., hosting promotional events and premieres in China, building theme parks and developing branding). This period also saw the opening up of the Chinese film market and the extension of the Chinese foreign film quota as well as the dramatic increase in China’s box office as a result of the country’s multiplex boom. As well as seeking a way into the lucrative Chinese film market, Hollywood studios’ China-special strategies were designed to appease the Chinese government censors and investors, to help compete for quota space and film financing. In this chapter I explain and evaluate Legendary’s China-strategy as a case study of the contemporary relationship between Hollywood and China during the China-special period. The successes and failures of Legendary East in its founding years demonstrate the complex obstacles inherent to this period. I propose that Legendary East’s primary purpose was to act as a “China agent” to secure Chinese finance, to receive favourable release dates and aid in marketing techniques, rather than to enter into a proper transnational partnership. In this sense, Legendary East is a translocal endeavour rather than a transnational one. Whereas transnational refers to

activities and relationships that transcend national boundaries (Hannerz, 1996), translocality is a term used to analyse 'phenomena involving mobility, migration, circulation and spatial interconnectedness not necessarily limited to national boundaries' (Greiner and Sakdapolrak, 2013: 373). According to Oakes and Schein (2006: xiii) translocality is defined as 'being identified with more than one location', thus indicating a process of adaptation; an identification with an "other". I argue that Legendary East represents the increase of translocal studio activities during this time period (2011 - 2015) or what Courtney Brannon Donoghue refers to as a 'translocal study' (2017: 3). Donoghue's (2017) approach to a translocal study of this kind involves establishing how local studio activities are nuanced and specifically designed for individual markets. I term these types of translocal strategizing as China-special techniques designed to appeal to the Chinese film market. By establishing how Legendary East demonstrates this nuance and specificity - or how it does not - the translocality of the company can be ascertained and analysed. This micro-level example helps to shed light on the macro-level forces at play. The Legendary releases in China during the years 2011 - 2015 are then analysed as examples of the wider social, economic and industrial developments in the Hollywood-China relationship during the second phase of the periodisation. Globalisation theory and cultural studies approaches are used to examine how Legendary employed a China-special strategy in their film content, release schedule and marketing campaigns.

As ever, in order to understand and position Legendary's China-strategy during this time it is essential to consider the political economic landscape within which it existed. On January 21st, 2010 the World Trade Organisation (WTO) ruled on the suit filed on behalf of the U.S. trade representative and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), which accused China of monopolising film importation and distribution and of unfairly limiting foreign imports. According to the WTO's verdict, China was found in violation of international trade rules. In March of 2011, in accordance with the WTO ruling, China was required to allow greater foreign participation in the distribution of films as well as

other media. This enforced relaxation of import rules revealed new opportunities for transnational corporations, which led to a flurry of activity including cinema construction, joint ventures, outsourcing of production and collaborations. Thanks to the multiplex construction boom of the late-2000s early-2010s, the increased number of cinema screens in China meant that there was an elevated demand for films. In short, due to the combination of relaxed importation rules and increased demand for films, the potential of the Chinese market was revitalised. Furthermore, the partnership between Sony and China Film Group (CFG) in 2010 on *Karate Kid* presented a co-production model for U.S. studios to circumvent the quota and enjoy advantages in Chinese territories such as securing exhibition, increased revenue shares and more valuable release dates and marketing opportunities. This led to a short but frenzied trend of Hollywood studios seeking joint ventures and collaborations with Chinese companies. Legendary East is a key example of this trend.

The formation of Legendary East was announced in the trade press on June 9th, 2011 (Graser, 2011). News of its formation was widely interpreted as a tactical move employed to gain access to the Chinese market (Graser, 2011, Landreth, 2011; Coonan, 2011a). Legendary East was touted to present an inroad to the Chinese territories in three distinct ways: by acting as a local (Chinese) company, by sourcing local (Chinese) investment, and by partnering with China's largest, at the time, independent film studio and entertainment conglomerate, Huayi Brothers Media Corp. (Graser, 2011). This tactic was emblematic of the China-special period where Hollywood studios were grappling to find ways into the Chinese market, past the strict quotas and censors. Legendary East represented one of the latest tactics; to enter as a domestic company. Peter Loehr (2018) explained the strategy for Legendary East as threefold: to 'maximise the success of Legendary's English language films in the Chinese market through aggressive marketing and distribution; to raise finance to reduce risk and find strategic Chinese partners to help support the release; and to focus on large co-productions'. This chapter will show how the Legendary East strategy succeeded in its aims, the problems it faced

and the obstacles it could not overcome and in doing so, interrogates the problems and identifies the opportunities that define the China-special period.

As part of the defining terms of Legendary East, films made by the Chinese arm would be distributed in China via their Chinese partner, Huayi Brothers, and distributed in the rest of the world by Warner Bros. as per Legendary's agreement with the Hollywood studio (Barnes, 2011; Graser, 2011). Reports stated that Legendary East initially planned to produce between one and two tentpoles per year starting in 2013 (Landreth, 2011; Graser, 2011; Barnes, 2011; Kilday, 2011). Kelvin Wu left his post as co-CEO of Orange Sky Golden Harvest to helm Legendary East and Huayi Brothers were given a role as shareholder in the company (Graser, 2011). At the time of the unveiling Tull spoke of the benefits of having a 'local partner' to help 'overcome the unique challenges of the China market' and reinforced the global scope of the new venture, explaining it was 'imperative that these be global films that attract an audience around the world' (Tull in Landreth, 2011). In another report, Tull emphasised his 'commitment' to China, noting that 'not having a plan in China for us is irresponsible' and of the power of the Chinese market, 'I think that when China matures as a consumer of entertainment, it's going to be nothing like the world has ever seen' (Tull in Goldsmith, 2012a). Notably, Tull said of Legendary East; 'the formation of our new company is about a commitment to growing our relationship with China long-term. This is not a parlour trick, it's just good film economics' (Tull in Landreth, 2011). Tull's language in this instance is revealing as he distinguishes between sound economic tactics and what he refers to as parlour tricks, which figuratively implies something that is intended to impress but is not practically useful, and in doing so qualifies Legendary East as a significant and worthwhile endeavour. There is also an implication that other companies seeking to establish inroads to China have been engaging in 'parlour tricks' - that is to say, in tactics designed to impress, but that lack practical use. This type of rhetoric which simultaneously singles out the importance of the Chinese market and conflates the Chinese film market with the global film market is paramount to the China-special period in which Hollywood

studios had recognised the need to appeal to the Chinese market but were not *actually* “committed” to adapting. Legendary’s motivations at this time were the same as everyone else’s; to capitalise on the potential of the Chinese market.

Historically, Hollywood has had local business operations in tactical foreign territories since the early 20th century, which, following the relaxation of China’s state-run film policies following the 2010 WTO ruling, opened the country up to the same (Donoghue, 2017). Establishing connections with China was certainly good film economics in theory (though problematic in practice), but whether or not Legendary’s China arm was indeed a “parlour trick” - to use Tull’s terminology - or merely a sound economic tactic is highly questionable. Tull insisted ‘instead of just coming over and opening an office, we felt it was truly important to put a stake in the ground,’...‘we have to earn our place here regardless of growth trends’ (Tull in Barnes, 2011). In his sentiments Tull attempts to differentiate Legendary from other studios who were strategically opening offices in China around this time. Interestingly, *Variety* called Legendary East an ‘essentially homegrown Chinese company funded by local investors’ (Graser, 2011a). However, this description is misleading. First of all, it is essential to note that Legendary East was a Hong-Kong-based venture (Graser, 2011a). Hong Kong is a significantly different territory than mainland China in terms of access, governmental control, and culture and because of this, Hong Kong represents an advantageous middle-ground between China and Hollywood. Having worked in co-production and collaboration with both Chinese and U.S. companies, Hong Kong companies understand both the U.S. and Chinese film industries and markets.

Two significant trade agreements between China and Hong Kong were enacted in the early 00s: the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) in 2003 and the Pan-Pearl River Delta Regional Corporation in 2004. CEPA was the first regional agreement between Hong Kong and mainland China, covering trade of goods, services and investment facilitation (Huang, 2013). The Pan-Pearl River Delta Regional Corporation

outlines an economic zone that incorporates all South China's provinces, including Hong Kong (Huang, 2013). Following a recession in the Hong Kong film industry in 1994, which critics blame on issues such as piracy, overproduction of low quality films, the competition with Hollywood and the 'brain drain' of creative labour (primarily to Hollywood) (Cheung, 2013: 11), CEPA offered Hong Kong cinema an opportunity for revitalisation and opened the gateway to the Chinese market. Specifically, the CEPA enables Hong Kong films to bypass the Chinese foreign film quota when they are classified as China-Hong Kong co-productions. In this sense, the quest for co-productions and collaborations between Hong Kong and China mirrors similar aspirations of Hollywood. Legendary East, for example, was relying on the CEPA to create co-productions with China.

Speaking about the formation of Legendary East, Kelvin Wu said that the aim of the company was to mirror Legendary's success in the West by delivering the 'same kinds of movies...in terms of budgets and revenues' (Wu in Shackleton, 2011) and that, delivering those kinds of films would 'rely heavily on the Legendary East team in Burbank [Los Angeles]' (Wu in Shackleton, 2011) in order to achieve success early on, rather than to have to build a China arm completely from the beginning in China. Wu attributed the formation of Legendary East to Thomas Tull's being 'inspired by' the success of *Clash of the Titans* (2010) and *Inception* (2010) in China; 'so he thought why not do something in a more systematic way?' (Tull in Coonan, 2011a). However, Wu noted that the Legendary East strategy also entailed becoming 'a member of the film community...in Greater China' (Wu in Shackleton, 2011) and to that end they intended on developing expertise in their Chinese base; 'our goal in the long-term is to have our own team, with a mixed culture of East meets West' (Wu in Shackleton, 2011). Both Tull and Wu's language and sentiments at the time of Legendary East's formation reflect, as one would expect, the usual kind of promotional rhetoric that is designed to boost a new business, but what is particularly interesting at this early stage is the intention on the one hand to accept and embrace Chinese culture and to pay homage to this important market and

culture and on the other hand to simply replicate the success of ‘Legendary in the West’ by making more of the same Western fare that does not involve Chinese elements. This is a defining example of the China-special period. Wu noted that the intention was not to try to make ‘pure Chinese movies’ but instead to ‘bring some universal values’; ‘this global audience will be fanboys...young kids, whether they’re in London or New York or Tokyo or Hong Kong’ (Wu in Coonan, 2011a). Both the ambiguity and the conflict between Chinese and U.S. “values” has been set out in the introduction to this thesis. Wu’s assertion of the link between universality of content and the concept of fanboys is particularly revealing. Fanboys’ values seemingly transcend national boundaries. The notion of a “pure Chinese movie” and “universal values” is contentious, but what is of particular interest here is the specific demarcation from the outset that the company, though publicised as an inroad to China, was not specifically making films *for* Chinese audiences. Rather, the intention was to use Legendary East to bring Legendary to China. In which case, it seems almost identical to the strategy other studios were using at the time by opening an office in China in order to facilitate better access to the market. Wu noted that although Legendary East’s output was intended to have ‘strong cultural ties’ with China, they anticipated that the Chinese market would make up ‘less than ten percent of the global revenues’ of the company’s films (Wu in Shackleton, 2011). Wu also made the point that the plan was to draw on the wealth of Chinese history and culture as inspiration for the films, particularly basing films on ‘Chinese stories’ but the focus was on *exporting* those films, and thus the focus would be tentpoles, in English (Wu in Coonan, 2011a). This is an example of what Jon Jashni described as ‘China viable’ as opposed to ‘China centric’ (McNary, 2012) and the idea that the goal is not to focus on the Chinese market as the primary market, but rather to try to make globally-minded films that succeed in China. This exemplifies the cultural dimensions of globalisation: the need to produce products that are culturally malleable and the glocalization of film by appealing to a universal audience. This misalignment is also identified in the difference between a statement from Huayi’s Wang Zhongjun who said of Legendary East’s foundation, ‘We hope we can make wonderful movies with Asian themes and

backgrounds' (Wang in Landreth, 2011) and Tull; 'I must stress that these are global movies we're making if we do our job correctly' (Tull in Landreth, 2011). Achieving this combination of global (U.S.) themes and Asian themes and backgrounds is a much harder task to achieve than to strive for, and this likely contributed to the problems that the company found with securing funding, building partnerships and, ultimately, making films. This incongruity is also evident at the macro-level as revealed at this time by the increased interest in establishing connections with China but the unwillingness to do so meaningfully as a mutually beneficial partnership. Robert Haymer, who worked on the Legendary East deal, said 'We're just trying to bring the fanboy experience to China', suggesting the aim was simply to ease access to China (Haymer in Siegel, 2011a). While Stephen Scharf, who worked on the deal alongside Haymer, noted that it was 'probably one of the most complicated deals' he had ever arranged (Scharf in Siegel, 2011b). With the exception of Orange Sky Golden Harvest and New World Development, the financial backers of Legendary East remained anonymous (Graser, 2011a). The formation of Legendary East was also separate from Warner Bros. in that Warner Bros. was not a shareholder (Landreth, 2011).

Around the same time, Warner Bros. announced plans to stream its films via You On Demand - China's first national pay-per-view and Video On Demand (VOD) platform (Barnes, 2011), marking another attempt to develop ancillary market streams in China. One of the key hurdles Hollywood producers/studios/companies face in developing ancillary markets in the Chinese regions are China's notoriously difficult internet censorship regulations. Issues surrounding access to or prohibition of internet markets and resources is a multifaceted and loaded issue for Chinese regulators. Access to the internet presents challenges to the legitimacy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) for similar reasons that cinema does; primarily because it is a powerful tool of communication that is difficult to control. The Chinese internet population has increased dramatically in the years of China's opening up and in 2008 China surpassed the U.S. to become the world's largest internet market (Barboza, 2008). As of 2016 more than half

the population of China had access to the internet, almost trebling the U.S. in market size in numbers online (UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, 2016). With increased population size come heightened challenges to societal control, and with increased access to technology such as the internet comes increased problems with controlling the representation of national identity.

Watching films online is one of the main ways that Chinese audiences consume films (EntGroup, 2012), meaning that royalties from online streaming have the potential to be an incredibly large revenue source. The rapid increase of online video space in China has revealed new problems as well as opportunities for copyright infringement and pirate DVDs have been replaced by free downloads (Brodbeck, 2013). The problem of piracy and copyright infringement has been a central concern for Hollywood for whom Intellectual Property (IP) is a critical source of economic growth and global competitiveness, and thus its protection under the PRC is paramount to Hollywood's economic success. In a 2013 study it was shown that China accounted for between fifty and eighty percent of the annual cost to the U.S. economy for Intellectual Property Right (IPR) theft, accounting for between \$150 billion and \$240 billion worth of losses in a year (The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2013). In the early 2010s, despite the barriers to legitimate distribution, the illegitimate distribution channels remained relatively unencumbered, with piracy rampant and high quality copies of pirated films widely available, and often before their official release date, if they were to be released at all (Byrne, 2010). As demonstrated by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) dispute raised by the United States with regards to the 'measures affecting the protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights' (WTO, 2009) China's intellectual property regime around this time was considered deficient, and some analysts argue the system even promoted piracy (Keane, 2006; Alderson, 2015; Bradsher, 2009; Brodbeck, 2013; Triplett, 2006; Cohen, 2008; Coonan, 2006; Sigismondi, 2009). Advocates of piracy believe it is beneficial to China as a critical proponent of creativity, allowing for inspiration from previous works to create new ones, to promote competition and create

new markets (Li, 2012; Montgomery, 2010; Raustiala & Sprigman, 2013; Tepp, 2013), or, as Jinying Li (2012: 543) puts it, piracy serves as ‘an alternative space of cultural circulation and consumption in urban China’. However, the situation also offers an advantage to illegitimate players because unauthorised films were not subject to the quota restrictions or censorship rules. In these examples piracy can be viewed as beneficial to China, while Hollywood stands to gain little. Hollywood can benefit from the marketing and word of mouth that pirate copies and market demand create but ultimately, they are at a financial loss. The loss to U.S. studios is a relatively small percentage of their profits (Danaher & Waldfogel, 2012), but it stands to reason that, given the advancing scale of the market, these losses are set to increase, and so the interest in solving the problem persists. However, claims that piracy prevents people from going to the cinema appear to be misleading, as proven by the unprecedented increased size of the Chinese film market in recent years. Nevertheless, the pressure on the Chinese government to undertake key reforms in order for their IP regime to be effective and compliant with the requirements of the WTO outcome characterised Hollywood-China relations during the China-special period.

Two months after the announcement of Legendary East, the company raised \$220.5 million through an investment by Paul Y. Engineering Group (PYE) in exchange for a fifty percent share in the company, leaving Legendary East management with a 40.1 percent share and Huayi Brothers with a 9.9 percent share (Kilday, 2011; Graser, 2011a; Coonan, 2011c). PYE is a Hong-Kong-based property management and engineering company that is publicly traded on the Hong Kong stock exchange (Graser, 2011a). Legendary East was at this time valued at \$441 million (Kilday, 2011). The equity raised through PYE would fund the first two films on the Legendary East slate, according to Kelvin Wu, who added that future projects would likely be financed through U.S. banks, using the residual revenue of the first two films, because ‘cost-wise it’s more beneficial to get financing in the U.S. as the interest is lower and they’re more used to this kind of asset-backed, library-based financing’ (Wu in Shackleton, 2011). This strengthens the argument that

Legendary East was better understood as “Legendary in China”. Tull (in Graser, 2011a) said of PYE’s investment,

another important milestone following the recent announcement of Legendary East’s formation. We share a common vision with PYE - that with China’s rapid economic growth and rich cultural background, this is a filmmaking marketplace on the rise. We are committed to China and the surrounding region for the long run, and to producing entertainment that is globally appealing in quality, scale and impact.

In this example Legendary exemplifies the China-strategy tactics that Hollywood studios were adopting during the China-special period; few in the industry at this time would *not* have shared this vision, since it was indisputable that the Chinese film market and industry were on the rise. According to Kelvin Wu, PYE was looking to ‘diversify their business’ since growth in the construction business had slowed in recent years (Wu in Shackleton, 2011). Wu noted that PYE’s construction business had little connection with the business of Legendary East and that it was ‘easier to run them separately than to find synergies that are not really there’ (Wu in Shackleton, 2011). The PYE deal is representative of a wave of Chinese construction and civil engineering companies investing in Hollywood films but marks the first investment of its size and scale. With the growth of China’s infrastructure and ever-changing skylines companies like PYE were profiting. However, the rate of construction was excessive and, ultimately, unsustainable, leading to under-occupied developments and ‘ghost towns’ (Fong, 2018). The Chinese government attempted to redirect construction and development investments into other industries, including the film industry. As Kelvin Wu put it,

The government does encourage the development of this industry, and many other industries have been growing so rapidly that a lot of excess capital has come to join the party. There are not too many avenues of investment in China so some of the property developers or mining entrepreneurs, when they’re slowed down by other regulations, have to find a new industry to invest in (Wu in Shackleton, 2011).

Wu added, 'Perhaps they also like this industry because they think it's cool' (Wu in Shackleton, 2011), which plays well with the fanboy image of Tull and Legendary. Wu noted that Legendary East was entering early in anticipation of the growth of the Chinese market; 'by that time, we'll already be here, not like some latecomers...we'll be a familiar face to SARFT and the creative community. And, more importantly, to the audience' (Wu in Coonan, 2011a).

Shortly after the announcement of PYE's investment came the announcement of the first film to be made by Legendary East, entitled *The Great Wall* (2016). The project was first announced in August 2011 to be directed by Edward Zwick, based on a story conceived by Thomas Tull and author Max Brooks (Graser, 2011b). Jon Jashni, who was at this time Legendary Entertainment's chief creative officer, was linked to the project at this early stage as a producer and said of the project; '*The Great Wall* exemplifies the type of globally appealing, commercial movie we intend to have Legendary East become known for' (Jashni in Kit, 2011). At the end of 2011, however, despite formally approving their investment of \$220.5 million in November (Coonan, 2011c), PYE pulled out of the agreement at the eleventh hour. According to the trade press, Legendary imposed an arbitrary deadline of December 31st, 2011 for the deal to be finalised (Abrams, 2012b). On the day of the deadline, PYE announced it was putting its investment into Legendary East 'on hold' due to 'shaky financial markets' (Abrams, 2012b; Coonan, 2012a). When Legendary's deal deadline passed, the relationship with Huayi Bros dissolved and on January 3rd, 2012, Legendary East announced they had parted ways with Huayi Brothers (Abrams, 2012b). The trade press reported that this split could make finding new investors easier, since investors had been put off by the proposed share size of Huayi Bros (10%), which they considered too high, as was the case in the breakdown of the PYE investment (Abrams, 2012b). This reporting appears to divert blame for the deal's demise to the Chinese parties and also reveals a dominant narrative that Hollywood's systems and intentions are sound. There is an advantage to the continuation of this discourse: it positions Hollywood - or the U.S. - as an authority, which reinforces their

power and underscores the presumption that Chinese companies and industries want and need to learn from and adapt to Hollywood/U.S. standards and systems. For example, the trade press reported that investors including PYE were dissuaded by the immaturity of the Chinese banking industry. As noted by Wu in an interview with *Variety*, ‘the banking industry in China in terms of maturity of products and innovation, especially in film financing, is still fairly primitive...banks need to be more understanding’ (Wu in Coonan, 2011a). This presumption on behalf of the Hollywood side is a fundamental underpinning of the China-special phase. What separates the China-special phase from the third phase - “Chinawood” - of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship is the belief on the Hollywood side that Hollywood was in a position of power; a presumption that Hollywood films were favoured by Chinese audiences and that Chinese practitioners sought to learn Hollywood techniques. To an extent, of course, there is truth to this. As this thesis has already established the Chinese film industry was underdeveloped around this time and Hollywood films were popular in China. The differences between the Chinese and Hollywood film industries and markets also served to problematise the China-special period. Up to and during the China-special period the financial system in China was very different to the U.S. China tended to use equity financing, unlike Hollywood, which tended to use debt or credit financing (Bao, 2017). In order for the U.S. system to work, completion bonds are used - and are essential - to ensure guarantees, whereas in China the concept of a completion bond did not exist. The two systems were fundamentally at odds and thus represented another point of conflict. This complicated and unfamiliar financial climate made deals more difficult to finalise; ‘many from Hollywood have called it the Wild East’ (Graser, 2013c). This is a prime example of rhetoric designed to position Hollywood in opposition to the Chinese system, wherein Hollywood is sophisticated, robust, mature and China is unsophisticated, shaky and immature.

In May 2012 Peter Loehr was appointed as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Legendary East (Coonan, 2012a). Loehr had previously run Beijing’s Creative Artists Agency (CAA)

office and had been living and working in China for many years (Coonan, 2012a). *Variety* reported that Loehr had been appointed to ‘help navigate the territory’ (Graser, 2013a). As well as running CAA, Loehr, whose Chinese name is Luo Yi (Zhang, 2007), was well established in the Chinese film scene. In 1996 he founded the first independent film company in China; Imar Film Co., going on to found Ming Productions - another independent company but one with ambitions to make films with larger budgets (Zhang, 2007). In addition, Loehr had first-hand experience of the film industry having produced ten independent Chinese feature films. According to the High Ranking Industry Person (2018) the Legendary East distribution department was ‘much more localised’ than other studios, in large part because Loehr’s background was in local Chinese production and distribution.

A year later, on May 30th, 2013, Legendary announced a multi-year deal with the China Film Co. Ltd (CFC) to co-produce and distribute ‘tentpoles’ developed for China and major global territories (Fritz, 2013; Graser, 2013c). China Film Co. Ltd is a subsidiary of China Film Group Corporation (CFG or CFG), the state-run enterprise that controls almost all areas of the Chinese film industry where film distribution, exhibition, production and promotion is handled or at least overseen by CFG (Davis and Yeh, 2008). The CFG also controls the importation of foreign films in China as well as any and all co-productions between Chinese and foreign entities (Davis and Yeh, 2008). This means that CFG is an unavoidable partner in the Hollywood-China relationship. CFG is also synonymous with the Chinese government and it is difficult to separate the two (Frater, 2014a). Initially, and up until 2016, the CFG was a wholly state-owned profit-driven enterprise (*qiye*), as opposed to a state-subsidized entity (*shiye*). Even after the CFG’s Initial Public Offering (IPO) in 2016, the company was still two thirds state-owned. The CFG was formed in 1999 in a consolidation and incorporation of its predecessor, China Film Corp., as part of a government-directed plan to reform, modernise and privatise the domestic film industry (Frater, 2014a; Davis and Yeh, 2008). CFG went on to monopolise film development, production, distribution and exhibition in China (Frater,

2014d). China Film Group Co. was also the only company licensed to import foreign films, through its subsidiary China Film Import and Export, and through another subsidiary, the China Film Co-Production Corporation, which was required to be involved in any and all co-productions that included China as a partner. In short, 'quite simply, CFG is the locomotive that the Hollywood majors must hitch on to if they are to release movies into the massive and fast-expanding Chinese market' (Frater, 2014d).

The pact between Legendary East and CFG, by no coincidence, came at a time when Legendary was looking for a new studio distribution deal and trade press reported that this was a tactical move in enticing partners (Graser, 2013b, 2013c; Kilday and Rose, 2013). This is another example of the type of China-strategies that were being employed during the China-special period. During this time, accessing the Chinese market was a top priority for Hollywood studios and developing connections and relationships were the key to that. In this way, the trade press uses Legendary as an example to promote the tactical entry to China. The CFG deal was reported to act as an 'open door to China' (Graser, 2013b) wherein in order to gain entry to the Chinese market studios need the backing of a Chinese distributor 'with clout' (Graser, 2013a). CFG is the most influential and resource-laden Chinese film entity as well as one of only two licensed distributors of foreign imports and has control over release dates, making it a particularly advantageous partner. Thus, the CFG connection presented Legendary - through Legendary East - with a significant inroad to China. *Variety* reported that the timing of the announcement of the deal was 'curious', given that there was no film project to announce through the deal, and that the announcement was clearly 'tied to something else' (Graser, 2013b). *The Hollywood Reporter* stated that the development slate would be announced in coming months (Hayden, 2013). Regardless, the China-special tactic certainly provided Legendary with significant additional leverage going into talks with studios.

Speaking about the CFG deal, Peter Loehr noted it allowed Legendary East ‘to collaborate on projects from the earliest stages, and create true co-productions with unique worlds, elements and stories that universally speak to audiences’ (Loehr in Hayden, 2013). This was the ultimate goal, but in practice it was fraught with complications and insurmountable issues that typified Hollywood-China deals during this period. The merits and obstacles of this ‘true co-production’ will be analysed in the following chapter in reference to *The Great Wall*, which claimed to pioneer this approach. Tull said of the deal; ‘We truly value the opportunity to work with China Film Co., a leader in the vital Chinese motion picture marketplace...We look forward to combining our very complementary strengths to serve the global entertainment market’ (Tull in Graser, 2013a). In the discourse around the CFG deal and around the Legendary East formation “China” is used as synonymous with “global”. This is a critical reversal of the use of “global” or “universal” as a euphemism for U.S. centric tastes and attitudes and highlights the tendency to combine individual territories into a global audience. Tull and Wu in particular continually refer to the Chinese market and the global market interchangeably. But the Chinese market *is* distinguishable and has its own specific demographics, tastes and obstacles. Interestingly, the then-chairman of CFG, Han Sanping, said of the deal that China Film Co. was looking forward to working with ‘Legendary East and are impressed by their strong achievements to date’ (Sanping in Graser, 2013a) but as a nascent company Legendary East had not had the time or the opportunity to develop this kind of reputation. Less than a week after the announcement of the Legendary East, CFG deal *The Hollywood Reporter* was already questioning its legitimacy citing the previous deals with Huayi Bros. and PYE that had fallen apart and that no projects were ever even announced (Tsui, 2013a; Kilday and Rose, 2013). Nevertheless, the deal presented Legendary with a significant inroad to China.

Despite the multiple advantages of a partnership with CFG, analysts recognised the relationship as being primarily an inroad to Chinese finance; ‘Even with these added

release benefits, most observers agree the primary objective for Legendary is increased access to Chinese money' (Tsui, 2013a). The High Ranking Industry Person (2018) confirmed that one strategy for Legendary East was to find strategic Chinese partners to put equity into films as well as helping facilitate their release. In April 2014 it was announced that CFG would co-finance *Warcraft: The Beginning* (2016) and *Seventh Son* (2014). Although neither film was produced by Legendary East; rather, Legendary East acted as a "China agent" in securing the co-finance arrangements for the Legendary produced films (McNary, 2014; Coonan, 2014b). Tull said of this deal, which amounted to a more than \$10 million investment on the part of CFC, as 'an important step in the evolution of our partnership with China Film Co.' (Tull in McNary, 2014). China Film Co.'s investment would also give them a credit on the films and would recoup their equity via worldwide sales (McNary, 2014). Indeed, the High Ranking Industry Person (2018) noted that Legendary East acted as an agent to secure Chinese partners to help in the marketing and release of, and investment in, numerous Legendary films, including: *The Great Wall*, *Warcraft*, *Kong: Skull Island* (2017) and *Seventh Son* and that 'most of the major Legendary releases had Chinese funding in them and this was facilitated through Legendary East'. Interestingly, around this time *Hollywood Reporter* opined that Tull's plan was to buy a studio (Tsui, 2013a) when - given hindsight - it would appear that his plan was to be *bought* as a studio and, knowing that Chinese companies ultimately wanted to own a Hollywood studio, he planned to make Legendary a viable and attractive option.

Despite the uneven trajectory of Legendary East, the Legendary Los Angeles films were performing well, and the company continued to raise funds (see Table 2.1) while increasing its collection of intellectual property and expanding its operations (Abrams, 2012b; Kilday and Rose, 2013). In 2012, speculation that Tull would attempt to take Legendary public (make an IPO) gathered momentum (Abrams, 2012b; Abrams and Graser, 2012a). Predictions were that Legendary would have secured a valuation of around \$2 billion in 2012 and that funds raised from the IPO would have likely been used

to finance more of its own films (Abrams and Graser, 2012a). With Legendary's deal with Warner Bros. set to expire at the end of 2013, it was incumbent upon Legendary to establish itself as a more established and capable company in order to negotiate a more independent deal that would ensure they had more autonomy than they had with Warner Bros. in 2005. In 2013 Legendary added a TV and digital media unit, which trade press also speculated was in order to add value to the company in order to produce a favourable deal and to show that Legendary was not beholden to Warner Bros. (Kilday and Rose, 2013).

Table 2.1: Ongoing funding secured by Legendary 2011 - 2015

Date	Amount and source of financing
2011	\$700 million
April 2012	\$128 million in new capital (Abrams, 2012a) from new investors including Google executives, Morgan Stanley's Investment Management and Thiel Capital (Block, 2012)
April 2012	\$150 million in debt (Abrams, 2012a) arranged by JP Morgan, Bank of America, Royal Bank of Canada and UBS (Block, 2012).
Dec 2012	\$443 million in equity from investment firm Waddell and Reed Financial (Abrams, 2012a)
Oct 2014	\$250 million investment by SoftBank, days after SoftBank stalled plans to purchase DreamWorks Animation (Land and Graser, 2014)

While Tull noted in his interview with Andy Sewer, 'our success starts and ends with Warner Brothers. They're fantastic partners and the best studio in the world' (Tull, Zeitgeistminds, 2010), by 2011 the trade press was starting to reflect a change in Legendary's focus. Legendary were turning their funds towards backing their own slate

of films developed by the Legendary team (Fritz, 2011a) which exacerbated discussions regarding the possibility of extending their partnership with Warners (Abrams and Graser, 2012a; Graser, 2013a). Issues included the ‘heated discussions’ over Legendary’s stake in *The Dark Knight Rises* (Fritz, 2011a) and Warner’s dislike of Tull’s ‘more hands-on approach to establishing Legendary’s own brand’ (Graser and Abrams, 2013). By this time Legendary had already started making moves to turn the company into a full-fledged studio by self-financing more films in the U.S., rather than as co-productions with Warner Bros., and abroad through Legendary East. Jillian Share (2018) recalled that Warner Bros. were ‘somewhat resistant’ to Legendary’s desire for more involvement,

They were expecting us to be a slate deal where they were going to say, “hey these are the few movies that we want you guys to come in on”, and that we would just come in. I think they were probably less than enthused about us saying, “we have all these notes and we’ll come in *if* this”. We had some growing pains there. I think any place that comes in with their own ideas, there’s always obstacles.

Legendary were declining to partner on films that did not fit within their fanboy-fare mandate (Graser, 2013a) and this was having an impact on their relationship with Warner Bros. It was therefore not much of a surprise that in 2013 the companies parted ways. In June 2013, *Variety* reported that Legendary and Warner Bros. had decided to terminate their arrangement at the end of their existing contract, which would take them until the end of 2013 (Graser, 2013c). Tull made it clear that Legendary’s goal in their next deal would be to ensure more autonomy; ‘we want to grow to a size and want to control as much of our destiny as much as possible’ (Tull in Graser, 2013c). Tull went on a promotional ‘roadshow’, visiting Comic-Cons and Wall Street to personally promote the Legendary brand (Abrams and Graser, 2012b). In preparation for this deal, Legendary had been making moves to improve its value by diversifying; buying marketing company FIVE33, hiring Bruce Rosenblum to head a TV division as well as Legendary East, continuing sizeable financing (Graser and Abrams, 2013) acquired Nerdist Industries (Graser, 2014). At this point Tull was reported to be in talks with Universal, Sony and Fox, but many agreed that Universal would be the best fit because

of the Legendary films being prime material for studio attractions in Universal's theme parks and also because of Universal's ties with TV and digital media, an area that Legendary was interested in developing (Graser and Abrams, 2013). Universal, meanwhile, was an underdeveloped presence in China and was looking for an inroad (Graser and Abrams, 2013). Also, Universal needed to replace the funding from the Elliott Management hedge fund that it was going to lose by the end of the year (Graser and Abrams, 2013).

The formation of Legendary East exemplifies the types of deals that were being made during the China-special period. Examination of the deal reveals the complicated task of establishing a China arm as part of a wider China-strategy and demonstrates the potential significant advantages of attempting such a feat, irrespective of tangible success. The reporting in the trade press further reveals attitudes towards the development of this kind of China-strategy by promoting Legendary's successes and downplaying their failures, while continually positioning Legendary (and Hollywood/China) in the position of power and Chinese companies in a position of immaturity. This type of reporting through a promotional lens is also evident in the discourse surrounding the reported influx of Chinese money in Hollywood around this time (2011-2015).

Chinese Money In Hollywood

During the China-special period there was a heightened talk of mergers and acquisitions (M&A) between Chinese and U.S. companies, with Dalian Wanda, Alibaba, Huayi Bros., and Fosun as well as internet giants such as Tencent and Sohu all rumoured to be considering or pursuing M&A or U.S. expansion strategies (Frater, 2014b). Continuing the circulating discourse that Hollywood represented a sound and alluring investment opportunity, *Variety* reported that Chinese companies were keen to 'make their mark

on the global media and entertainment scene' and saw 'corporate moves in North America as achieving that objective faster than organically building U.S. content divisions, and far quicker than trying to export incremental amounts of Chinese content' (Frater, 2014b). Chinese companies were however reportedly cautious as a result of a track record of bad deals between China and Hollywood (Garrahan and Sender, 2016). Confabulation aside, the trade press widely reported the existence - or rather promise - of Chinese money in Hollywood, when there was very little evidence of it. As noted by *The Hollywood Reporter*, 'the rumour, the logic and the promise of Chinese money and many signed deals for it, have begun to remake the industry and suggest a future of almost unlimited expansion...and yet, in fact, there is very little actual Chinese money in Hollywood' (Wolff, 2015). Up until early 2015 only two examples of Chinese investment in Hollywood existed: the purchase of AMC Cinemas by Dalian Wanda and the backing of STX Entertainment by a Chinese private equity firm. However, both of these examples are exceptions. The Wanda purchase of AMC is better understood as real estate diversification (Wanda at this time being a predominantly a commercial real estate company) and the STX deal, rather than exemplifying a deal that connects Hollywood to the Chinese market, is a singular private-equity transaction rather than evidence of long term strategy. Failed attempts to merge or collaborate is a characteristic of the China-special phase.

There were a number of significant attempts to create co-ventures during this time but all of them were flawed or failed. Shanghai Oriental DreamWorks Film & Television Technology Co. (Oriental DreamWorks) was announced in 2012 as a joint venture between China Media Capital, Shanghai Media and DreamWorks Animation and was intended as a Chinese content studio, aimed to immerse itself more fully into the Chinese film industry with a production facility in China (Szalai, 2012). However only one film, *Kung Fu Panda 3* (2016), came out of this studio before CMC Capital Partners acquired full ownership and rebranded as Pearl Studio in 2018 (Brzeski, 2018a). HBO and Tencent entered into a content deal that made the latter the 'official online home' of

HBO content (Szalai, 2014). However, this deal was problematised by the tightening of online content censorship (Coonan, 2014a), since many of HBO's programmes deal with taboo subjects that are censored or banned. Jack Ma, the co-founder and then-chairman of Alibaba, famously visited Hollywood in late 2014 and was courted by significant industry moguls, and met with Sony, Paramount and 20th Century Fox, though no deals came from it, and then announced an offer to buy a controlling stake in Lionsgate, only for that transaction too, never to lead to a production. In 2011, Relativity Media invested in a China-based entertainment production company, SkyLand Film & Television Cultural Development Ltd. along with additional financial backing from SAIF Partners and IDG China Media with the intention of creating films and television shows based on Chinese culture and with worldwide appeal (Fritz, 2011c). SkyLand eventually became a subsidiary of Relativity and was reported to have a close relationship with Huaxia Film Distribution Co. and Relativity went on to form a joint partnership with Jiangsu Broadcasting Corp. in 2014 (McNary, 2014). However, the only film to come from this venture was *21 And Over* (2013).

A more successful example of a Hollywood-China pairing is DMG Entertainment, which started life as a marketing and advertising company before diversifying 'aggressively' into distribution and production around the time of the Beijing Olympics (Brzeski, 2018a). The company, which was co-founded by Dan Mintz and Peter Xiao, began distributing non-Chinese films in China and entering into film production, producing both U.S. films and Chinese-language films, with their first film being *The Founding of a Republic* (*Jiànguó Dà Yè*) (2009), a Chinese historical film commissioned by the China Film Group. DMG went on to co-produce big Hollywood tentpoles such as *Looper* (2012) and *Iron Man 3* (2013). In 2014 however, when the China branch of DMG went public on the Shenzhen exchange, due to Chinese regulations it meant that Mintz, as a non-Chinese citizen, was not permitted to hold an executive position at the company (Brzeski, 2018b). DMG was split in two - a Chinese company, Yinji Entertainment and Media, and a U.S. one, DMG Entertainment - but they continued working under a

contractual partnership, with the Chinese company importing the U.S. company's films under favourable terms (Brzeski, 2018b). In 2018, however, following a court ruling that froze 44 percent of Yinji stock for three years after the company failed to repay a loan, the Chinese company crashed (Brzeski, 2018b).

In March 2015 STX Entertainment entered into a deal with Huayi Bros., wherein the latter would co-finance at least eighteen films to be produced over a three-year period. Rather than becoming a stakeholder in STX, Huayi would own part of every film they financed, across all revenue streams. STX made it clear at the time of the deal's announcement that the agreement would not impact the types of films they were making, for example, it would not be making Chinese-language films (Lang, 2015b). Also, significantly, the STX/Huayi films would not be able to bypass the foreign film quota because of the nature of the venture as being one of investment rather than a production partnership (Lang, 2015b). This distinguishes it from the Legendary East deal with CFG as well as Oriental DreamWorks, both of which were joint production ventures. Disney and Shanghai Media Group expanded their existing partnership to include film co-productions (Coonan, 2014a)¹. The STX deal exemplifies the complex cultural, political and financial negotiation - or tug-of-war - that underlies these ventures and largely accounts for their common failure. In effect, this tug-of-war is an extension of the negotiation over soft power. Co-finance arrangements do not directly relate to an increase or decrease in soft power, whereas co-production agreements, which also in the case of Chinese co-productions, necessarily involve the inclusion and more often promotion of Chinese elements, Chinese labour and Chinese locations, by their nature stand to impact soft power.

This tug-of-war and ultimate impasse are further demonstrated in the case of Studio 8. Studio 8 initially announced a deal with Huayi Bros. However, rather than investing financially in any films or in the company, Huayi Bros. opened up an office of its own to

¹ At the time of writing no films have come out of this partnership.

evaluate films on an individual basis to determine their involvement. Following the failure of a deal with Huayi, Studio 8 announced an investment by Fosun - a private Chinese conglomerate with significant media holdings. This deal, though reported to total around a \$200 million investment, also reportedly contained a caveat that a 'significant part of the investment' would be allocated on a 'project-by-project basis' (Wolff, 2015), implying that the funds are not guaranteed if, for example, the first few films do not succeed. Only one film - Ang Lee's *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* (2016) - was produced by the partnership prior to 2018.

These deals are undone by what Wolff (2015) refers to as 'the cultural misunderstanding that can complicate international transactions.' These "misunderstandings" are a consequence of the clash between business cultures, where Chinese companies place more importance on developing relationships and U.S. companies are more interested in the end product of the deal (Gu et al., 2008; Brzeski, 2016g; Wenderoth, 2018). In China, tremendous importance is placed on relationships, or what is referred to as *guanxi* - a system of social networks and influential relationships that facilitate business dealings (Gold et al., 2002; Whyte, 2002). *Guanxi* is a fundamental doctrine of Confucianism and it is based upon notions of mutual trust and reciprocity (Gold et al., 2002). By comparison, business culture in the U.S. is impersonal. This creates a distinct incompatibility and one that is further problematised by the underlying issue of misinformation and mistrust endemic in Sino-U.S. relations, as outlined in the introduction to this thesis.

In addition to mergers and acquisitions, connections were also being forged in the form of setting up offices and building studios. Universal opened a Beijing office and started building a Universal theme park in Beijing (Coonan, 2014a). The construction boom had led to the existence of 'ghost towns' where unwanted or unneeded buildings and towns had been built but remained empty (Fong, 2018). Around 2015 a new construction drive was taking place, this time focusing on movie studios and theme parks (Frater, 2015a).

Chinese companies also set up U.S. offices; Alibaba and Wanda both set up headquarters in Los Angeles (Coonan, 2014a). There were also public and private film funds set up by Chinese investors and the Chinese government respectively to fund Hollywood films with the intention of exporting them to China to invigorate the market (Coonan, 2012b; Kung, 2012). All of these activities exemplify the varying attempts on behalf of both sides in developing relations during the China-special period. The continued growth of the Chinese film market prompted Hollywood and Chinese companies to overcome this impasse. This would ultimately lead to the third phase in the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship, which will be discussed in chapter three.

Factors Affecting Legendary Releases in China, 2011-2015

Significant events during the period 2011-2015 impacted upon Legendary releases in China. These same factors managed and dictated Hollywood's relationship with China during the China-special phase. In 2012 the "Memorandum of Understanding between the People's Republic of China and the United States of America Regarding Films for Theatrical Release", or MOU, also known as the U.S.-China Film Agreement, forced China to increase the film quota and stipulated the agreement be reviewed in 2017 (MOU, 2012). In this 'understanding' China agreed to certain provisions, including an increase to the quota system to allow in an additional 14 'enhanced format' films, and increasing the U.S. gross box office revenue share for revenue-sharing films in the twenty-film quota from 13 to 25% (MOU, 2012). The MOU also made the provision for privately-owned Chinese businesses to distribute foreign films, thus ending the previous state monopoly (EntGroup, 2012).

America's success in the WTO ruling in 2010 revealed new business opportunities and as a result U.S. companies returned to China (Su, 2016). Agreements were made to build screens, to use Chinese talent and locations, start co-production ventures and to enter

the Chinese TV streaming networks (Kokas, 2017; Su, 2016). Prior to the 2012 MOU, the only body permitted to approve the films allowed in on the quota was the China Film Import and Export Corporation, which was a wholly state owned enterprise (Byrne, 2010). The MOU stipulated that ‘any Chinese enterprise’ was eligible ‘to apply for and be granted a license to distribute imported films’ and that the government would not get in the way. In addition, the Memorandum said that it would ‘promote reform’ by ‘encouraging’ Chinese entities, including private entities, to do so. The MOU also stipulated that the review process by Chinese Administrative Approval Law would be completed in less than thirty days, and that any rejections would be adequately explained.

One of the most significant achievements of the MOU was the increase to the quota. What is particularly interesting is the stipulation that the additional quota slots would be filled by ‘enhanced format’ films, such as 3D and IMAX, in order to ‘further the PRC’s media policy to expand the country’s digital theatrical footprint and product range’ by taking advantage of America’s technological advancements (Kokas, 2017: 28). Enhanced formats require theatre-based technology, which not only encourages people to go to the cinema but also helps reduce the risk of piracy. In addition, such films are also priced at a premium, increasing box office rewards. *Avatar* (2009) pioneered new 3D technology and, by no coincidence, was a huge box office success in China, and is largely responsible for highlighting to both China and Hollywood the potential of the Chinese market (Child, 2010).

But despite the intentions of the 2012 MOU, there were still many issues regarding its implementation. With the increase of the quota Hollywood in 2012 imports performed better than ever, receiving over half the market share for the year (51.5%) for the first time in nine years (EntGroup, 2013). As had been the fear of the Chinese government, this appeared detrimental to the domestic industry in China both in terms of diminishing domestic box office yield and by making the Chinese market susceptible to the

domination of Hollywood. By allowing U.S. films to dominate Chinese theatres there was less opportunity for Chinese films, centred on Chinese culture and values. In this light, the stunt in the growth of the Chinese domestic market presented a threat to Chinese national cinema and to the promotion of Chinese values. In 2013, to aid the domestic market in protecting itself against Hollywood, the Chinese Film Bureau introduced a value added tax system, which taxed the revenue share of foreign producers rather than gross box office revenue. China also uses a ‘double-dating’ technique; releasing two or even three Hollywood films on the same day to drive down their box office yield (Vlessing, 2013). According to the EntGroup report in 2014, the market share divide between domestic and imported films in China was back to ‘normal’ in 2013 and 2014, that is, the share for imports was back to under 50%. This continual renegotiation highlights the complex and often contradictory balance between protectionism and market revenue that has characterised the Chinese government’s attitude towards Hollywood for decades.

During the seemingly exponential increase in cinemas and cinema goers in China, the system of box office reporting was subject to manipulation. Irregularities included distributors obscuring results and cinema chains under- or over-reporting box office sales and doctoring tickets (Cain, 2017a; Frater, 2015b; Herring, 2018). As a prime example, in August 2015 *Terminator: Genisys* (2015) was released in China and performed well at the box office. A week later a propaganda film, *The Hundred Regiments Offensive* (*Bǎituán Dàzhàn*) (2015), which was produced by state-owned film companies to commemorate the anniversary of World War II, was released and seemingly eclipsed *Terminator: Genisys* in the box office charts despite playing on far fewer screens; *Regiments* had 99,728 showings while *Genisys* had 250,435 (Brzeski, 2015a). However, prominent players in the Chinese film industry took to social media to claim malfeasance (Brzeski, 2015a). In an open essay titled “Entertainment Capitalism” an anonymous author alleged that the major Chinese cinema chains had been given quotas by CFG to ensure that the film met specific box office targets, in exchange for

which the cinemas would receive an increased share of the box office revenue as well as tax incentives (Brzeski, 2015a). This was confirmed by a cinema chain manager who spoke anonymously to *The Hollywood Reporter* (Brzeski, 2015a). Furthermore, cinemagoers took to social media to post photos of doctored tickets wherein the film title (*Regiments*) had been scribbled out and another title added (Brzeski, 2015a). In another example, when the Chinese domestic film *Monster Hunt* (*Zhuoyaoji*) (2015) broke box office records in China allegations came to light that figures had been inflated by cinema chain Broadway Circuit, which was operated by EDKO Films - the producers of *Monster Hunt* (Brzeski, 2015b). Furthermore, showings of *Monster Hunt* that were supposed to be sold out were often nearly empty and showings were scheduled to play every fifteen minutes on the same screen (Brzeski, 2015c). In response to numerous cases of manipulation, online ticketing services were developed to prevent this kind of false reporting (Frater, 2015b; Liao, 2018). Simultaneously, online ticketing platforms were developed to provide an additional and valuable insight into market research by incorporating reviews, news and marketing (Liao, 2018). According to Joseph Liao (2018) by 2018 around eighty-five percent of cinema tickets were purchased online and two companies - Alipay and WeChat - monopolised the industry. This presented a significant advantage where marketing is concerned because it meant that there were only two companies to target and also because it presented significant data mining opportunities.

In the U.S. marketing is still focused on the traditional print and ad (P&A) campaigns and newer digital and social media campaigns. In China, where the government exercises control over advertising (Gao, 2007) marketing films is a very different process. Traditional P&A marketing strategies are not ideal in Chinese territories for a number of reasons. In addition to the restrictions placed on advertising by the government, there is also usually a short window between the securing of a Chinese release date and the release date itself. With there being so little time between the two dates, there is not enough time to implement the kind of traditional campaign that Hollywood is used to. However, given the size of China's online population and the popularity of online ticket

sales, online advertising and social media marketing is by far the most appropriate strategy for Chinese audiences. Joseph Liao (2018) indicated not only the expansive role of online ticketing in China but also its power and its role as a communicator of information from American companies. Liao (2018) noted,

they started to add in some of the media functions, so you could find the news out there [about the films], and it's very fast; whatever is reported in the *Hollywood Reporter* or *Variety* or *Deadline Hollywood*, the next day you will see a Chinese version [of the same story]. There are all kinds of materials, trailers [etc. available via these applications] and so it becomes not just about buying tickets online but also [becomes] a media outlet itself.

The film news reported on online ticketing platforms is taken from the U.S. trade press (such as *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Deadline Hollywood*) and so these ticketing companies become a tool for disseminating information from American companies. Liao (2018) explained that this significantly impacts marketing strategies because of their monopoly. In this sense, on the understanding that the trade press are extensions of marketing and promotion machines, online ticketing companies act as agents of cultural imperialism by promoting U.S. products covertly.

Furthermore, the development of online ticketing companies has also led to improved access to industry relevant information. Joseph Liao (2018) explained that online ticketing companies have introduced 'professional' versions for industry professionals, where there is access to the instant box office and there are tools for analysis of scheduling and a media function that allows access to analytical reports focused on network trends. In short, Liao noted, these platforms are 'very, very advanced'. This is indicative not only of the progressive industrialisation of the Chinese film market but also of the significant power of these online ticketing companies. According to the High Ranking Industry Person (2018) Legendary utilised Chinese market strategies, in particular the adoption of 'grassroots' marketing techniques that included implementing localisation, a focus on social media advertising and promotion and developing Chinese

partnerships (HRIP, 2018). These grassroots strategies, which will be explored in more detail in chapter three, include taking advantage of the power of the online market through targeted advertising, the leveraging of local talent through exposure on local television programmes and variety shows and reaching local stars' fans via social media (HRIP, 2018).

In 2013, despite the relaxing of the quota, imported film box office revenue had decreased by twenty-one percent while China's domestic film box office revenue had increased by 144 percent (Frater, 2013a). This turnaround was a result of a number of factors including changes to content, exhibition and marketing. Crucially, the Chinese government eased restrictions on content, allowing filmmakers more creative expression. Directors such as Xu Zheng (*Lost In Thailand*, 2012), Zhao Wei (*So Young*, 2013) and Xue Xiaolu (*Finding Mr. Right*, 2013), were not afraid of adopting Hollywood styles and, content-wise, Chinese directors started eschewing previous national staples such as historical epics, adopting instead Hollywood genre fare such as horrors, thrillers and romantic comedies.

A key circulating discourse in the trade press is the idea that the Chinese film industry seeks to mimic or learn from the Hollywood model (See for example: Frater, 2013a; Coonan, 2011a; Frater, 2015c; Coonan and Johnson, 2010; Goldsmith, 2012b; Coonan, 2012d; Moore and Kuo, 2010; Masters, 2016). The suggestion is that the adoption of Hollywood industry practices increases the quality of finish (in the technical and professional standards of the filmmaking process and the film products, which is itself reliant upon Hollywood talent and expertise), which leads to higher revenues and international success. This discourse implies that there are specific systems and standards that represent good practice or some kind of formula that can achieve these outcomes. This also represents Hollywood's struggle to maintain their dominance as the most innovative and advanced film industry in the face of trade liberalisation and shifts in global production chains that have seen China rise and the U.S. struggle. There is an

assumption that Hollywood practices are superior and that, by adopting these practices, Chinese filmmaking had ascended to these standards. This is prejudiced and ideologically weighted, but it also undermines the established talent in the Chinese industry and the advances made as a result of government-led initiatives designed to invigorate and develop the domestic industry. In addition, during the China-special period the Chinese film industry became more diversified in its film output, focusing on smaller cities (3rd and 4th tier cities increased their box office revenue by thirty-four percent in 2013) (Frater, 2013a). Since the production boom that saw a dramatic increase in cinema multiplexes, smaller cities had access to films, which led the market tastes to diversify, accounting for new genre fare and creative expression.

Studios were starting to see the impact of the increased revenue share and in 2014 revenues were up sixty percent for the year (China's box office revenue was up by 1/3rd from 2013) (Coonan, 2014a). The success of *Transformers 4: Age of Extinction* (2014) had a significant impact on Hollywood, simultaneously identifying the immense and still-growing potential of the Chinese box office and the stark difference between the Chinese and U.S. market tastes (*Transformers 4* was a box office failure in the North American market). Meanwhile in 2014, President Xi Jinping reasserted that art (including films) must serve socialism and the people, must not 'bear the stench of money' nor be 'slaves to the market' (Jinping in Coonan, 2014a), which was in stark contrast to the capitalist characteristics of Hollywood, further complicating the prospect of finding a "universal model" to appeal to both. Marketing of Hollywood films in China took new forms during this time. Hollywood studios started to make the effort to send cast members there for publicity and recognised that there is a positive correlation between stars who make a trip to China to promote their films and the reception of those films (Coonan, 2014a; Song, 2018). Legendary's releases in China act as illustrative examples of what was going on during this time with regards to the developments in content exchange, box office figures and marketing tactics.

Legendary Releases in China, 2011-2015

Between 2011 and 2015, eleven Legendary releases were allowed into China; *Sucker Punch* (2011), *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), *Wrath of the Titans* (2012), *Jack the Giant Slayer* (2013), *Man of Steel* (2013), *Pacific Rim* (2013), *Godzilla* (2014), *Interstellar* (2014), *Seventh Son* (2014), *Unbroken* (2014) and *Jurassic World* (2015). Though box office data for this time period is more available than the years covered in the previous chapter, its reliability is still questionable due to box office irregularities, particularly the over- or under-reporting of box office figures (Herring, 2018; Brzeski, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). In addition, during this time box office takings were further obstructed by China Film Group withholding box office returns (McClintock, 2013a). *Sucker Punch* is a good example of the lack of reliable data on box office and release info in China. According to IMDb and Douban, (IMDb, 2019a; Douban, 2019a) the film was released in China on April 15th, 2011. There is, however, no Chinese release date or box office data on Box Office Mojo nor is it available elsewhere. Due to the lack of information on *Sucker Punch*'s Chinese box office yield I have omitted the film from Table 2.2 below, to avoid obscuring the data. Box office data for *Wrath of the Titans* (2012) is not available on *Box Office Mojo* and has been sourced from the trade press (Coonan, 2012c). Data for this film was unavailable for a time due to the local Tomb Sweeping holiday in which China commemorates ancestors (Stewart, 2012a). This discrepancy highlights an issue of validity in *Box Office Mojo* as a source, but it is still the most reliable repository for this information (since box office data is not recorded in a repository elsewhere). *Box Office Mojo* gets its data from a variety of sources, including film studios, distributors, and production companies from around the globe.

Table 2.2: Legendary releases in China between 2011-2015; box office data and MPAA rating.

Film	MPAA Rating	U.S. B.O. (million \$)	China B.O. (million \$)	% of WW from China B.O.
<i>Sucker Punch</i> (2011)	PG-13	-	-	-
<i>The Dark Knight Rises</i> (2012)	PG-13	448.1	52.8	4.9
<i>Wrath of the Titans</i> (2012)	PG-13	83.7	25.4*	
<i>Jack the Giant Slayer</i> (2013)	PG-13	65.2	8.4	4.3
<i>Man of Steel</i> (2013)	PG-13	291	63.4	9.5
<i>Pacific Rim</i> (2013)	PG-13	101.1	112	27.2
<i>Godzilla</i> (2014)	PG-13	200.1	77.6	14.7
<i>Interstellar</i> (2014)	PG-13	188	122	18.1
<i>Seventh Son</i> (2014)	PG-13	17.2	27.6	24.1
<i>Unbroken</i> (2014)	PG-13	115.7	5.4	3.3
<i>Jurassic World</i> (2015)	PG-13	652.2	228.7	13.7

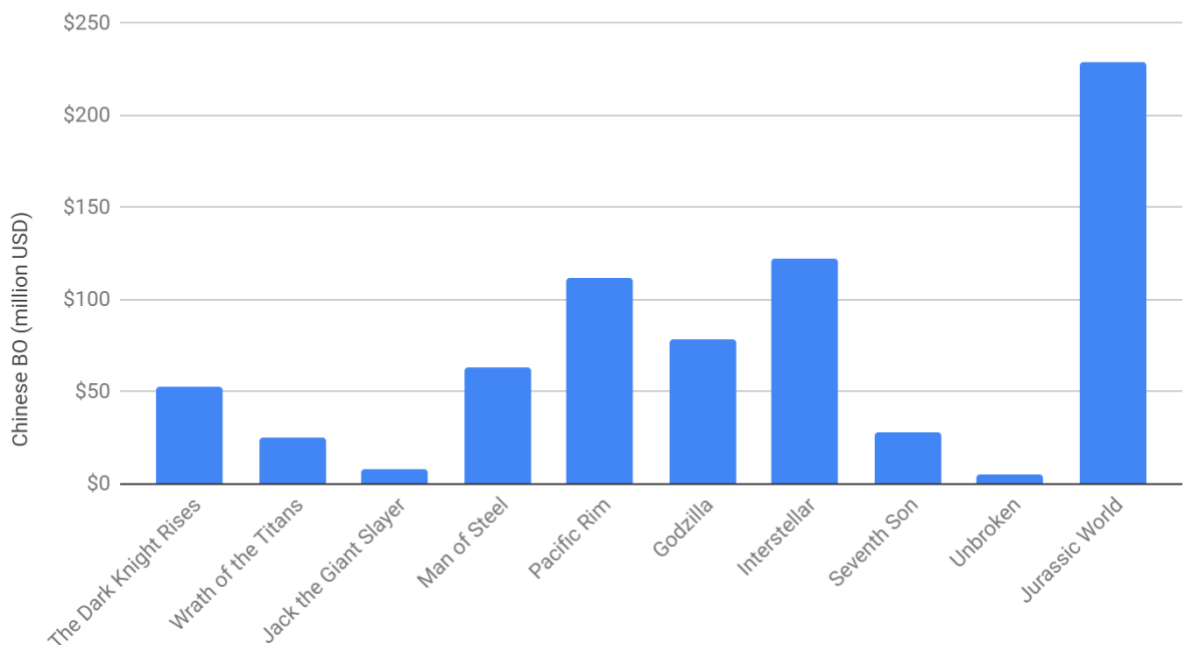
(Data taken from Box Office Mojo: see appendix A) **Wrath of the Titans* Chinese box office taken from Coonan (2012c)

Between 2005 and 2010 the box office trajectory of Legendary films in China follows a rising curve, whereas the box office figures for 2011-2015 are erratic (see Fig. 2.1). The films that Legendary released in China between 2011 and 2015 tell much about the development of Legendary's China strategy and the wider political and socio-economic relationship between China and Hollywood during the China-special phase. For a start,

a much higher proportion of Legendary's films during this period received a Chinese release. Only six of the twenty-two films released by Legendary between 2005 and 2011 made it onto Chinese cinema screens. Legendary released a further twenty-two films between the years 2011 to 2015, and of those, eleven were released in China. This was down to factors that are covered in this chapter, including the proliferation of cinema screens in China, an easing of restrictions of content by the Chinese government, and Legendary's improved connections with Chinese entities.

Fig. 2.1: Performance of Legendary Films in China 2011-2015

Performance of Legendary Films in China between 2011-2015

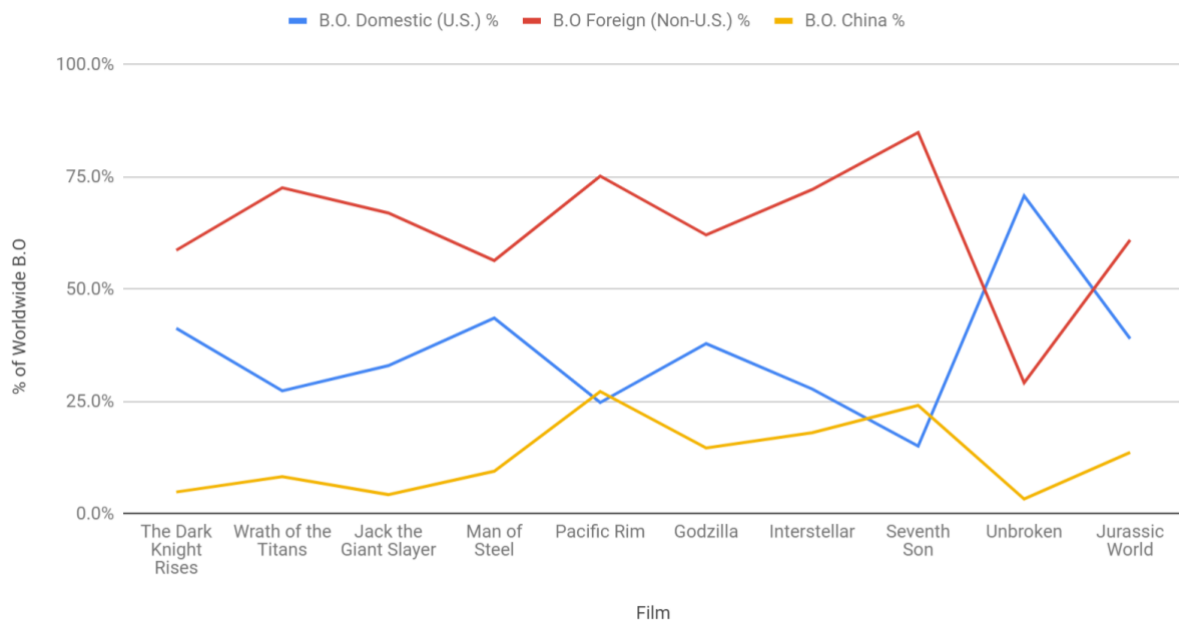


(Data taken from Box Office Mojo: see appendix A. **Wrath of the Titans* Chinese box office taken from Coonan (2012c))

The Chinese box office yield follows in a similar pattern to the Foreign box office (see Fig. 2.2) suggesting that there is a similarity in audience tastes. Comparatively, there is

evidence that the U.S. and China have distinct differences in taste since the films that do well in one market often do badly in the other. For example, *Pacific Rim*, *Seventh Son*, *Unbroken* and *Jurassic World* all performed very well in the Chinese film market but performed poorly in the North American market.

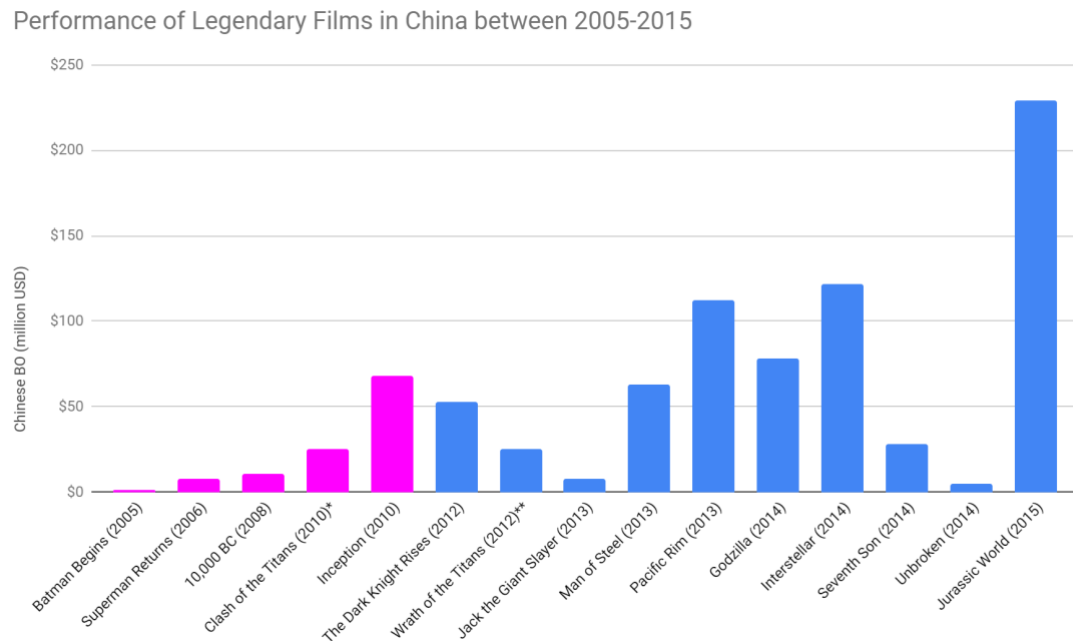
Fig. 2.2: Percentage Revenue Split Across Legendary Films Released in China 2011-2015



(Data taken from Box Office Mojo: see appendix A. **Clash of the Titans* taken from Screen Staff (2010) ***Wrath of the Titans* Chinese box office taken from Coonan (2012c)

Unlike the pattern in revenue data from the previous chapter, which increased incrementally with each Chinese release both in overall Chinese box office and in the percentage of the overall coming from China, the years 2011 to 2015 show a more complicated trajectory (see Fig. 2.3). Although the trajectory after 2011 appears erratic it also exemplifies two key things: that there were more films allowed into China and that films started to make considerably more money. Despite the trajectory being unpredictable, this period contains many significant events. *The Dark Knight Rises* achieved the second highest 2D opening to date (Stewart, 2012b).

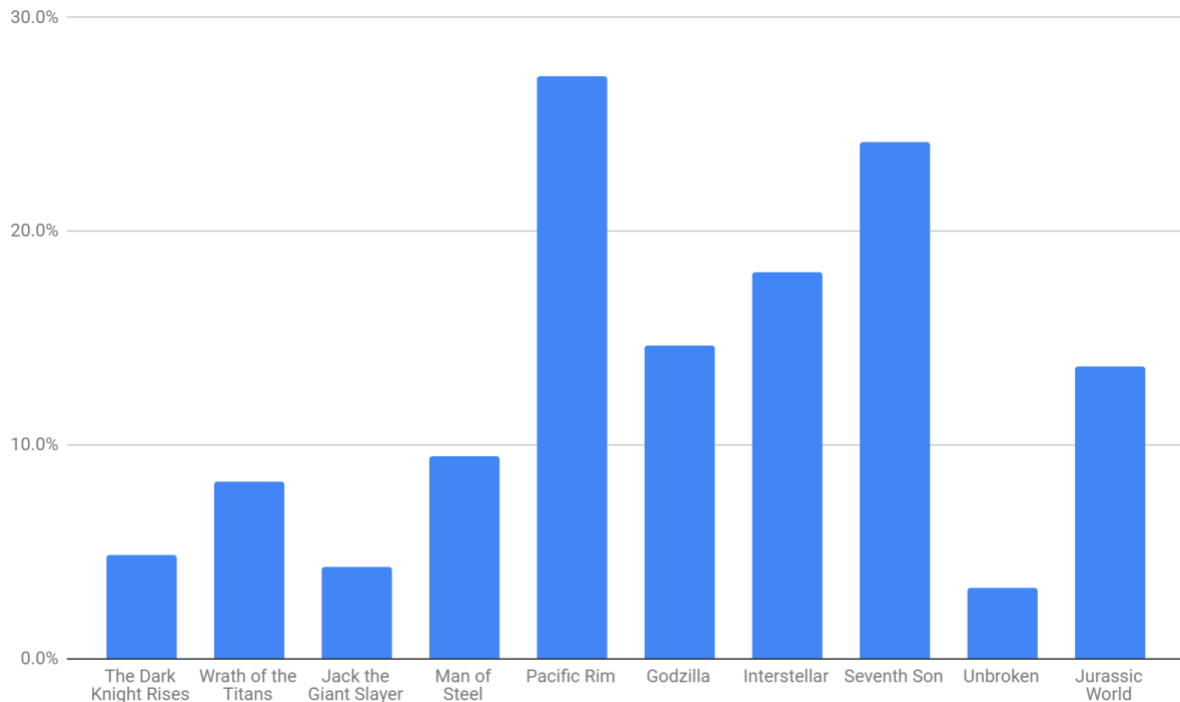
Fig. 2.3: Performance of Legendary Films in China 2005-2015



(Data taken from Box Office Mojo: see appendix A. **Clash of the Titans* taken from Screen Staff (2010) ***Wrath of the Titans* Chinese box office taken from Coonan (2012c)

At the time of its release, *Pacific Rim* became the top grossing Warner Bros. film in China, marking a significant increase in box office revenue (McClintock, 2013b), nearly trebling the box office percentage coming from China (see Fig. 2.4) and the film's success became a bargaining chip for deal talks with Universal (Frater, 2013c). *Jurassic World* broke Chinese box office records although this was in line with an all-time high international box office record for that year (Child, 2016). However, the Chinese box office revenue still only accounted for fourteen percent of its worldwide box office. *Man of Steel* underperformed despite having a favourable Chinese release and having been predicted to take around \$100 million (McNary, 2013).

Fig. 2.4: Percentage of Box Office Revenue Share from China



(Data taken from Box Office Mojo: see appendix A. **Clash of the Titans* taken from Screen Staff (2010) ***Wrath of the Titans* Chinese box office taken from Coonan (2012c)

During the China-special period industry analysts began to overly-anticipate the Chinese market, as exemplified by predictions that the box office would grow faster than it did, which helps to explain why some films - such as *Man of Steel* - appear to have underperformed. For example, *Man of Steel* was released against a local film *Badges of Fury* (*Bú Èr Shén Tàn*) (2013) before being overtaken in the box office charts by another local film, *Tiny Times* (*Xiao shi dai*) (2013).

“Pandering” to China

In recent years academics and the trade press have repeatedly accused Hollywood of “pandering” to Chinese audiences (see for example Carroll, 2013; Song, 2018; Swanson, 2015; Rosen, 2015; Zhu, 2014, Qin, 2017). The very use of the word “pander” suggests a form of infantilisation and is, in this regard, a loaded term. This “pandering to”, or “consideration of”, the Chinese market, demonstrates China’s rise in what Chris Berry (2010) refers to as the ‘transnational order of globalisation’. This type of transnational pandering is evidenced in three key areas: content, release dates and marketing techniques. Furthermore, the evidence of pandering of this kind is a fundamental characteristic of the China-special period. The techniques used to appeal to Chinese audiences and investors are China-special techniques; they are examples of including “special” references, techniques, considerations specifically for the Chinese territories. Chinese audiences influence Hollywood content in three key ways; in the use of transnational storytelling, which simplifies cultural differences and blends cultures and nations) (with emphasis on visual effects (VFX) in the incorporation of Chinese elements (this includes casting, locations, brands and culture), and in the avoidance of taboo subjects in efforts to pass the Chinese censorship process. As a result of the WTO lawsuit the U.S. won against China in 2010, China increased its import quota from twenty to thirty-four in 2012, with the additional fourteen places reserved for “enhanced format” (3d and IMAX) films. Thus, the *high concept* strategy that Legendary would go on to specialise in and become famous for, as alluded to in the previous chapter, was in line with the types of films that China was interested in importing; enhanced format spectacles. These types of films characteristically rely on transnational storytelling, which are easier for global audiences to understand. The universality of transnational film has long been employed by Hollywood as a tool by which to promote its soft power. As Ezra and Rowden (2006: 2) note, Hollywood ‘has both influenced and been influenced by the flows of cultural exchange that are transforming the ways people the world over are making films.’ Thus, catering to the Chinese audience in this respect did not require a dramatic realignment of strategy. It can be argued, however, that China’s market tastes influenced an increased effort to focus on these kinds of transnational tentpoles.

By no coincidence, all of the Legendary films released during this time period fit into this category: spectacle-based, culturally fluid, high concept fare. As has been detailed in chapter one, this format is the typical style of post-postclassical Hollywood films, which are increasingly globally-minded and spectacle-oriented. Thus, there is a symbiotic connection between post-postclassical Hollywood and the relationship between Hollywood and China.

As a defining characteristic of the China-special period, Hollywood films increasingly integrated Chinese elements in order to appeal to Chinese audiences and to assist in local marketing strategies, or what Andrew Ross describes as ‘the vast commercial appeal of Chinese theming’ (2009: 58). Including Chinese references is designed to promote familiarity, decreasing cultural distance between the North American and Chinese audiences. In their study, Kwak and Zhang (2011) identify director reputation, actor reputation, localised contents, local participation, release time, and genre as being linked with the performance of U.S. films in China. All of these characteristics require an understanding, awareness and consideration of the Chinese film market. Demonstrating these qualities increases the chance of a favourable response by a Chinese audience (Kwak and Zhang, 2011). Legendary films during this time exemplify some of these techniques. For example, the immense success of Christopher Nolan’s *Inception* (2010) helps to explain the success of two more of his films during this time: *Interstellar* and *The Dark Knight Rises*, reinforcing the important roles that director and reputation play in a film’s performance in China. *Inception* was apparently uncensored (Landreth 2010) in Chinese territories, possibly owing to the complexity of the film’s narrative and editing. As a visually spectacular IMAX product that starred Leonardo DiCaprio, who had a fanbase in China following the immense success of *Titanic* (1998), the film contained many elements that help to produce success in the Chinese film market. *Pacific Rim*, meanwhile, was set in the China Sea. However, this also led to criticism that the setting was used deliberately to reinforce North America’s commitment to maintaining stability in the Asia-Pacific area and in doing so fostering sentiments of paternalistic propaganda

(Child, 2013). There was no apparent logical motive for setting the film in a Chinese location; there were almost no Chinese characters (other than a team of Chinese pilots who play a minor role in the film and are the first to die) nor any other Chinese elements to justify or explain the setting. One of the more surprising films to receive a Chinese release was *Unbroken*, which depicts graphic violence that would normally have been expected to call for censorship under the Chinese guidelines, which supports the suggestion that the anti-Japanese theme was appealing to Chinese audiences.

None of the Legendary films released in China during the China-special period featured Chinese characters in any of the main cast. They did, however, feature Asian characters: Japanese actress Rinko Kikuchi played the female lead in *Pacific Rim*, Ken Watanabe played a supporting role in *Godzilla*, *Unbroken* cast Japanese singer/songwriter Miyavi, and *Jurassic World* cast BD Wong, who is of Chinese descent, and Indian actor Irrfan Khan in supporting roles. In this regard, the Legendary films do not incorporate Chinese characters, suggesting that their China-strategy was not focused on representation. Furthermore, in *The Dark Knight Rises*, Marion Cotillard, a French actress, played the role of a character that was meant to be from Arabia. This was an example of whitewashing, wherein a white actor was cast to portray a character that was intended to be non-white. Whitewashing is one of the key ways that Hollywood manages and dictates the hegemonic position on race. By “replacing” non-white characters - or non-white stories - with white characters and stories, the balance of representation is further undermined and culturally appropriated. In her work on the cultural and mechanical mechanisms that limit the opportunities of minority actors, Nancy Wang Yuen (2016) argues that white actors are “allowed” to “crossover” into other racial categories in their performances. In addition to which, Yuen (2016) notes, minority actors already have access to fewer parts and are systematically cast in stereotypical roles. Thus, the whitewashing of characters in this way is doubly problematic. By casting Cotillard - a white actress - in the iconic role of Talia al Ghul, Legendary contributed to the whitewashing of non-white representation. Thus, while making small efforts to appeal

to Chinese audiences, Legendary was still promoting U.S.-centric values that promote the Western hegemonic position on race. However, incorporation of Chinese elements as part of a China-strategy can also draw criticism from U.S. audiences such as in the case of *The Great Wall*, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Successful incorporation of Chinese elements requires these elements to be sufficiently integrated into a film to avoid disrupting the film. Also, crucially, adoption of Chinese elements does not on its own secure success at the Chinese box office; they need to be paired with the multitude of “behind the scenes” techniques that are outlined throughout this chapter including favourable release dates, targeted marketing and promotional events.

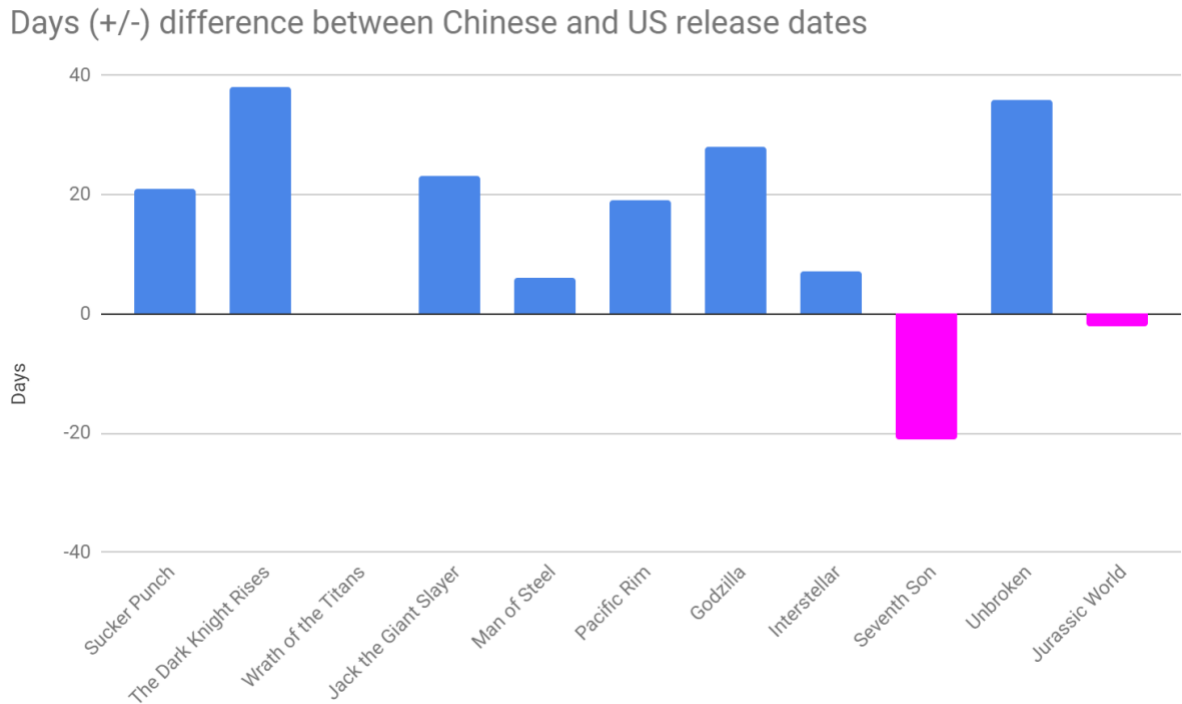
Release Dates

Unlike in North America where schedules are carefully calculated months in advance and selected for their healthy competition (Rubin, 2019), Chinese release dates - at least of foreign imports - are set a lot closer to the time and are not scheduled to avoid conflict, as in the U.S. They are also subject to restrictions such as blackout periods and ensuring China’s two-thirds rule, which incentivises Chinese cinemas to ensure that two-thirds of the films shown are Chinese, in exchange for tax benefits. In the case of *Man of Steel*, the film had a significant advantage being released with no other foreign competition (Tsui, 2013b). In other cases, Hollywood films are pitted against each other to drive down their success. For example, *The Dark Knight Rises* was released on the same day as *The Amazing Spider-Man* (2012). This was a particularly significant example of the “double-dating” technique because they were both superhero films. This was also to do with the extension of the blackout period that summer, which was intended to balance the scales with the additional foreign films, leaving a smaller window for foreign releases (Fritz et al, 2012). Despite having the second largest 2D opening, *The Dark Knight Rises* ultimately took less than *The Amazing Spider-Man* (McClintock, 2012). Two reasons for this were the delay between the U.S. and Chinese release dates and because

China had not received the second instalment of the rebooted franchise (*The Dark Knight*).

Pacific Rim, meanwhile, was released during a 'semi-blackout', during which foreign films were more limited, but not prohibited (Coonan, 2013d) marking an easing of blackouts in the face of the pressure being put on the Chinese government to relax restrictions in the aftermath of the 2012 MOU. Though no official reason was given, it is conceivable that Legendary received preferential treatment in the wake of their collaboration with CFG. In 2014 *Godzilla* was released in China without foreign competition and reports suggested that the studio's 'foothold' in China gave it preferential treatment in this way (Lang and Graser, 2014). *Wrath of the Titans* was the first Legendary title to be released day-and-date with China. *Seventh Son* was the first Legendary film to be released in China *before* the U.S. by a lengthy margin of three weeks (see fig. 2.5). This was almost certainly due to it also being the first release of a Legendary film that was financially backed by CFG.

Fig. 2.5: China release dates



With the increased box office returns of U.S. films in China came the advent of the phenomenon of Hollywood films taking more in China than in the U.S., which led to an increased reliance on the Chinese market to “recoup costs” of U.S. market flops. *Jack The Giant Slayer* was reported to be entering the Chinese market ‘banking its fate’ on the foreign box office (McClintock, 2013a). This appears to contradict the notion that Chinese distributors are guided by a film’s financial success in overseas markets since it secured its release date *after* it had already had a poor domestic release. *Seventh Son* was released early in the Chinese territories and went to lengths to draw attention to its ‘international focus’ (Graser, 2015a) but there appears to be no evidence of a specific international focus in the form of international elements, marketing or promotional strategy other than to state its international focus outright. Although this does not fit the model of recouping costs because the film was released in China first, the film had already suffered major rewrites and production delays so, one could argue, that it was

a pre-emptive move to focus on the Chinese market in an attempt to recoup costs it anticipated to lose in other markets. *Pacific Rim* was also hoping to recoup costs (McClintock, 2013b) and did. The success of the film in China led directly to talks of a sequel (Barnes, 2013). This reveals another trend during the China-special period, whereby sequels were greenlit based on performance in China, such as in the case of *Transformers*, signifying the ongoing negotiation of Hollywood's global position by making allowances for films that perform well in the global marketplace despite poor reception in the domestic film market.

Marketing

As identified earlier in the chapter, the marketing practices in China are very different to in the U.S., particularly in terms of their internet-focus. During the China-special period, ancillary markets were an undeveloped industry in China, whereas in Hollywood, ancillary markets made up a large portion of a film's profits. In 2014 the CFG launched an initiative intended to increase consumer product sales at theatres in China by nominating 1500 top-ranked Chinese cinemas to sell movie-themed merchandise (Verrier, 2014). According to the plan, the CFG would set up a licensing deal with the studio and would then find a manufacturer to design and produce the merchandise, sharing profits between the CFG and foreign studios dependent on level of sales (Verrier, 2014). At the time, La Peikang, Han Sanping's replacement chairman of the CFG, said that the revenue from merchandise was 'nearly zero' and that this needed to be addressed in order to build a more mature film industry in China, while also addressing the issue of piracy (Verrier, 2014). In 2015, Wanda Cinemas announced a deal with Mtime, China's leading movie site, to build 'merchandising centres' in Wanda's top cinema locations (Lang, 2015c). Mtime have the rights to merchandising for Disney, Warner Brothers and Universal Pictures, among others (Ge, 2016). In 2016, in the face of a disappointing box office growth, ancillary products such as film-related merchandise

helped to bolster the losses, accounting for between twenty and twenty-five percent of the company's revenue (Ge, 2017). The popularity of counterfeit goods, along with the growing desire for authentic film products, is enough to make it reasonable to expect the growth of movie merchandising in China to grow in parallel with the Chinese box office (Brzeski, 2016a). In North America, only thirty percent of film-related revenue comes from the box office itself, compared to eighty percent in China (Brzeski, 2016a). In terms of Chinese cinema's global aspirations, the goal was to create its own domestic film-products to export, rather than merchandising Hollywood film-products.

A High Ranking Industry Person (2018) explained that Legendary films came into China via the China Film Group, but because CFG does little in the way of marketing in China, the big Hollywood studios tend to do their own marketing and distribution work for their releases. *Pacific Rim*, *Godzilla*, *Seventh Son*, *Warcraft* (2016), *Skull Island* (2017) and *Pacific Rim: Uprising* (2018), were 'Legendary Los Angeles' movies with Legendary East in charge of marketing and distribution in China (HRIP, 2018), indicating that Legendary East acted as a marketing and distribution agent for Legendary films in China. In 2012 Legendary began building a data business, resulting in the creation of a demographics software, the Eddington program, which works by segmenting four core film-goer demographics - male, female, over twenty-five and under-twenty-five - utilising online preference data to inform marketing campaigns (Gaudiosi, 2014). The software is particularly suited to Chinese marketing because it is focused online. The High Ranking Industry Person (2018) also described how Legendary East was more aggressive in the non-theatrical space and brought in partners in order to maximise revenue, because unlike other major studios who have ten or more releases in a year, Legendary had two or three and so it was crucial to maximise each release. As an example of this, Legendary's *Seventh Son* announced a partnership with Locojoy, a Chinese mobile gaming company, to promote the film with a game version; this was the first deal of its kind between U.S. and China (Coonan, 2015b). This kind of connection was likely made possible by Legendary East, who were, according to a High Ranking Industry Person

(2018), pioneering more aggressive grassroots marketing and branding, which other studios were not doing at the time, at the same scale.

Another practical issue that Hollywood studios face is that there is often a very short window of time between receiving confirmation that a film has secured a release date in China and the release date itself. For example, in the case of *Jack The Giant Slayer*, the studios were notified twenty-one days in advance of the film's Chinese release date (McClintock, 2013a). In the case of *Man of Steel*, the studio was only given two-weeks' notice (Tsui, 2013b). *Godzilla*, by comparison, had five-weeks' notice before its Chinese release date (Frater, 2014c), which might explain why the film had a more extensive marketing campaign. It should be noted that the marketing and press for *Godzilla* was particularly intensive worldwide; as the last film to come from Legendary and Warner Bros. this marked a rebrand of sorts. At this point, the Tull mythology resurfaced, making Tull synonymous with the film, situating him as creatively paired with Gareth Edwards - the director - (Graser, 2014) (see Fig. 2.6) and reinforcing the fanboy image with Comic-Con appearances and special event marketing. Essentially, Legendary used the film as a branding exercise for a "more autonomous" Legendary. In this example, Legendary's post-post-classical studio-as-brand is acutely symbolised.

Fig. 2.6: Thomas Tull and Gareth Edwards on the cover of *Variety*

The “advanced” notice of the Chinese release date was likely due to Legendary’s connection with CFG. No sooner had *Godzilla*’s release date been announced, a video of one of the film’s stars - Bryan Cranston - was released on Chinese social media, with Cranston greeting the Chinese audience, directly, and introducing the film’s trailer. *Seventh Son*, meanwhile, was reported to employ a ‘strategic international focus’ (Lee, 2015) but there does not appear to be any evidence of this. This suggests a promotional rhetoric designed to boost sales in the global market for a film that was perhaps anticipated to fail. Despite paying lip-service to the significance of the Chinese market by releasing it early in the Chinese regions, the film did not follow-up with additional “behind-the-scenes” components that are needed; it did not include Chinese elements and did not employ targeted marketing or promotional events. These behind-the-scenes components are the difference between superficial and meaningful consideration of the Chinese film market.

During this time period (2011-2015) Hollywood studios were starting to appreciate that Chinese audiences reward studios and stars who “make the effort” to visit China and so more films started having premieres in China and the top billed actors started attending. This movement of talent is indicative of the move towards translocal marketing strategies. As an example, *Godzilla* had a Beijing premiere, during which the director Gareth Edwards was interviewed by Zhang Yimou and Zhang unveiled his plans to direct *The Great Wall* (Gbtimes Beijing, 2014). However, Edwards was the only Hollywood representative in attendance - none of the cast were there. *Interstellar*, which Legendary had a reduced stake in after their break from Warner Bros., had a Shanghai premiere, which the film’s stars attended which may be linked to the film’s success in the Chinese market.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the formation of Legendary East and the strategies it used to create an inroad to China, which I have framed within the second phase of the contemporary relationship between Hollywood and China. The “China-special” phase, which spans the years 2011-2015, is characterised by the increased investment of Hollywood studios in creating content designed to appeal to the Chinese film market and the start of the quest for the Hollywood-China co-production model. This chapter has shown how Legendary exemplified these translocalized “China-special” strategies, in particular through the founding of Legendary East. I have argued that Legendary East was a “China agent” designed to secure Chinese finance and to receive favourable release dates and aid in marketing rather than developing a mutually beneficial transnational partnership. Legendary East was part of a wider trend at the time, but it was used as an example by the trade press to situate Hollywood as in a position of power. By positioning Legendary - as a purported Hollywood studio - as being at the

forefront of progressive China-special strategies, it contributes to a circulating narrative in the trade press that the U.S. film industry is mature, progressive and powerful. The Hollywood-China relationship during the China-special period, as constructed in the trade press, was based on a belief that China was an underdeveloped film industry that sought to learn from Hollywood's presumed industrial superiority. The circulated narrative that the Chinese industry was underdeveloped worked to further strengthen the assertions not only that the Hollywood industry was superior but also that the Chinese industry could and should learn from their U.S. counterparts. This narrative played a large role in the ongoing negotiation of power that underpinned and shaped the contemporary relationship between China and Hollywood. Chapters three and four will examine this presumptive superiority in the case of the production of *The Great Wall*.

This chapter has also included an analysis of Legendary's releases in China between 2010-2015 and in doing so has argued they represented China's diversifying market tastes, which became more nuanced with increased choice following the influx of cinemas and the relaxation of restrictions on films entering the market. This is also an example of Legendary's attempt to 'engage globalisation' (Manning and Shackford-Bradley, 2010: 36), that is, their failure to represent multiple perspectives. Legendary's China-strategy is evident in the ways in which the studio catered to a Chinese audience by reducing the time between U.S. and Chinese release dates, including Chinese elements and self-censoring. However, as this chapter has shown, by failing to effectively pair Chinese elements with "behind-the-scenes" techniques such as favourable release dates, targeted marketing and promotional events, the Legendary China-strategy can be accused of "pandering", exemplifying the kinds of superficial strategies adopted by Hollywood studios during the China-special period. In the next chapter, *The Great Wall* acts as a case study to further interrogate the Legendary China-strategy in its most collaborative project and as an example of the third phase of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship: "Chinawood".

Chapter 3

Phase Three of the Contemporary Hollywood-China Relationship: “Chinawood” (2016-2017)

Drawing on interview data regarding the experiences of industry personnel who worked on *The Great Wall* (2016) this chapter will show how the concept and the production process of *The Great Wall* exemplifies Hollywood-China relations during the Chinawood period. The pre-release, release, and aftermath of *The Great Wall* encapsulate the third phase in the periodisation of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship, which I term “Chinawood”. The Chinawood phase takes place in the brief but deeply significant period when Hollywood sought to *combine* forces with China. Just as Geoff King coined the term Indiewood to refer to the integration between American independent cinema and Hollywood, I term this period “Chinawood” to refer to the merging of China and Hollywood. This phase refers to the brief period between 2016 and 2017 and is characterised by the quest for a “fully-integrated” Hollywood-China co-production; one that fully combines Hollywood and Chinese film production practices and filmmaking that is tailored to both a Chinese and North American audience equally. As this chapter will show, *The Great Wall* was the only real venture of this kind as it acted as a test case that ultimately failed. This chapter explores the extent to which the film acted as an indication of the extent to which Hollywood was attempting to appeal to the Chinese industry by appearing to promote Chinese culture and championing the Chinese film industry’s transnational aspirations. I suggest that the project is better understood as a tactical strategy to promote Legendary’s commitments in China, ahead of the Dalian Wanda (hereafter Wanda) acquisition. By assuming the onerous task of combining Eastern and Western cultures both in front of and behind the camera, the film became inextricably linked with wider contextual China-U.S. relations, exemplifying the obstacles of Sino-U.S. filmmaking endeavours. In doing so, it demonstrated wider issues

in Sino-U.S.-relations, revealing the ongoing negotiations - and incompatibilities - between the two superpowers. This incompatibility was manifested in the incongruity between Chinese and U.S. film production systems as experienced on *The Great Wall* by the personnel interviewed for this research.

The film was heralded by the trade press as the most significant attempt at a Sino-U.S. film collaboration. As a Chinese-themed Hollywood tentpole, combining the auteurist reputation of Zhang Yimou, a famous Hollywood star - Matt Damon - and a majority Chinese supporting cast, the film was uniquely situated to test Hollywood-Chinese collaborative filmmaking on a global audience. The purpose of the film appears, according to interview data and the trade press, to have been two-fold: to combine Eastern and Western cultures and values both in front of and behind the camera and to bridge the gap between Chinese and North American audiences. This combining of the two cultures, though, is based on a naive assumption; a presupposition that such an amalgamation is possible in the first place and that Chinese and North American values are able to be defined. I contend that a transnational cultural partnership of this kind is contingent upon three key factors; understanding and appreciation (in this case, respect for one another's values, practices and ideas), compromise (choosing a system or creating a new system) and working towards a shared goal. By way of an analysis of the film's production I show how and why the film represented the incompatibility between the competing cultural and industrial forces at play. Borrowing from Sheldon H. Lu (2001: 26) my task was to 'analyse closely how these processes of large-scale globalisation, which are driven by transnational capital across regional boundaries, are mediated, reflected or resisted in actual texts of art'. I suggest that the film failed precisely because of its ambitions to merge the two cultures and the conflict between market and political aspirations. This was manifested in the film's creative decisions and was translated into a poor response from U.S. audiences, which will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

The purpose of this chapter is to bring together an analysis of the pre-production, production and post-production, and marketing of *The Great Wall* in order to assess what the film reveals about transnational cinema by outlining and interrogating the idea of a Hollywood-China intersection at the industrial, market and cultural level. The story of *The Great Wall* centres on a Western mercenary fighter, William (Matt Damon) who is imprisoned within the Wall for attempting to steal gunpowder. Here, William discovers the secret purpose of the Wall: that it was designed to keep out monsters called “Tao Tei”. The Tao Tei monsters that the Wall was built to defend against are based on creatures from Chinese mythological - taotie - that represent greed (Allen, 1991), thus serve as a metaphor for defending the Chinese people from gluttonous ideologies. During his captivity, William is witness to the impressive Chinese army - the Nameless Order - and embarks on a path of redemption and ultimately heroism as he decides to aid the Nameless Order in their protection of the Wall.

During the pre-release, Hollywood majors watched with great interest to see how the project would fare. As a Sino-U.S. co-production, restrictions and requirements were placed on the film including the need to contain Chinese cultural elements, to ensure that Chinese personnel made up a large part of the cast and crew and that it did not contravene the censorship guidelines. All three of these imperatives negatively impacted upon the production process and the resulting product as will be shown in this chapter. I argue that the story in *The Great Wall* was designed to bridge the gap between China and the West offering an imaginary solution to their differences and bridging the cultural divide, but as evidenced by the problems experienced during the production of the film, it exemplified the perseverance of the divide between the two film production cultures and highlighted their irreconcilable incompatibilities. The project reveals a kind of poetic irony; a film about a wall, designed to build a bridge, that ended up revealing and reinforcing division.

Pre-production

The concept for the film came from Thomas Tull himself. As Jillian Share (2018) explained; it was ‘an original idea of Thomas’ where he was like, “what if the Great Wall was really built to keep out monsters” and it sort of went from there’. Tull told *Variety*, ‘when I was a little boy, I heard that the only man-made object you could see from space was the Great Wall of China. Whether it is true or not, I could not conceive of the feat of engineering and ingenuity needed to build it. And I’ve been fascinated with it my whole life’ (Tull in Frater, 2016a). There is a distinct problem with the idea of the film coming from an American since the idea involved re-writing Chinese history, fabricating a new story to explain the origins of China’s most famous historical heritage. It is an example of Hollywood’s notorious cultural appropriation. Tull was only presenting a kernel of an idea to be built upon by a transnational team, but when viewed in light of Hollywood’s long-standing tradition of re-writing history and cultural appropriation and in the wider context of North America’s history of cultural colonialism it is unavoidably problematic. It would seem most appropriate, given the film’s purported objective to combine cultures, to ensure that the writing team compromised both Chinese and North American writers. There are six writers credited on the film: the story by Max Brooks, Edward Zwick (who also wrote and directed *The Last Samurai* (2003) which was seen to appropriate Japanese culture) and Marshall Herskovitz, the screenplay by Carlo Bernard, Doug Miro and Tony Gilroy. All of these men are American. Thus, at a conceptual, story, and script-level, the film is entirely American. In addition to which, because the idea came from Tull - the head of the studio - it imposed upon the project a creative restriction. Chris Bremble (2018) noted that it was a ‘vision of an individual’, which created a kind of ‘orthodoxy’ and presented a set of ‘rules’; ‘a rigidity in the overall conceptual evolution of the movie’. This may well account for why the script’s development process was both long and complicated, according to The High Ranking Industry Person (2018), who explained that the original first draft of the script was completed in 2011 then abandoned when it was decided it might be better to take it in

a ‘different direction’, which is an industry euphemism for interpersonal disagreements that usually result in the collapse of a collaboration. After Zhang Yimou joined the production as director, more writers were added and more changes took place (HRIP, 2018). This extended and convoluted script development indicates two key things: firstly, that the idea and script took a long time to develop and secondly, that a lot of different writers were involved in the process. This is important because it helps to explain some of the issues and criticisms of the story and script that would ultimately contribute towards the film’s downfall. These concerns will be examined in chapter four.

Chris Bremble (2018) pointed out that the idea was always to make it a ‘visual effects spectacle’ as opposed to ‘a historical drama’. Bennett Walsh (2018) described the difficulty in working with the source material, ‘the inception of it being a monster movie was early on so we could never have challenged that. You are fighting conventions and you’re just trying to not make it hokey’. However, Bremble (2018) points out that this orthodoxy, which he suggests made it difficult for the film to achieve its full potential, was not imposed so much as it was not questioned,

there was never a battle over this. It wasn’t like Thomas Tull was being asked; no one was saying “let’s change it” with Thomas saying “no”. It was just, this is Thomas’ thing, this is what we’re doing, and if we want to do something, it’s going to be this. So some really fundamental issues that may have come out in a development process, never came out.

This particular insight speaks to the role of Tull as producer-auteur. The film was promoted before, during, and after its release as a significant cross-cultural endeavour. Eric Hedayat (2018) noted that ‘even though it was supposed to be a cross-cultural film, it was supposed to be a big Hollywood tentpole film’ and it is in this distinction that a fundamental issue is revealed whereby the film’s cross-cultural ambitions were secondary to or at least separate from its role or character as a Hollywood tentpole. A tentpole film is one that supports the financial performance of a studio; thus they are designed to appeal to a wide audience and to support ancillary tie-in products. One of

the overarching clichés about Hollywood tentpoles is that they are supposed to be “universal” or go through what Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden (2006: 2) refer to as ‘cultural and ideological cleansing’ in order to ‘maintain their mainstream inoffensiveness’. However, Hedayat’s observation undermines this notion, putting the film’s universalism in competition with the expectations of a Hollywood tentpole. Hedayat’s observations are supported by the other producers and crew members interviewed for this thesis and are evidenced by the experiences of those personnel.

In an extra feature on the Blu-ray, Thomas Tull explained, ‘one of the things that we wanted to do was to make a movie together. It was truly East and West’. On the same extra feature Peter Loehr noted ‘it is such a huge, huge film, and it does require so much. It requires the ability to straddle the cultures and to tell a very Chinese story in a way that an international audience will love it’ and Jon Jashni added, ‘The challenge for us was combining traditional Chinese culture with Western filmmaking techniques’. If, then, the Hollywood objective is taken to be to combine cultures and achieve crossover success, the film faced significant difficulties. For a start, as noted by the High Ranking Industry Person, bridging the gap between the Chinese and North American markets is an ‘extremely complicated and difficult task’ (HRIP, 2018). Jillian Share (2018) recalled the benefit of having Peter Loehr as an ‘instrumental’ aid in ‘bridging the gap between what works for Chinese audiences and what works for American audiences’. Loehr is an American producer who has lived in Beijing and is fluent in Mandarin. As was highlighted in the previous chapter, locality is a key to understanding the market. While Loehr’s expertise undoubtedly benefited the film’s transnational ambitions, he was presented with an impossible task of combining two such opposing cultures. The film’s large budget made it a significant investment which meant its success was all the more imperative. Bennett Walsh (2018) noted ‘because of the size of the film, it was the constant conversation of, does this work in the East? Does this work in the West?’ Ensuring the success of the film and its co-production status meant appeasing the Chinese censorship board. According to the High Ranking Industry Person (2018) before filming starts a

script is submitted to the board who will come back with one of three decisions: ‘go ahead, go ahead but change certain things or this film cannot be made’. The High Ranking Industry Person (2018) explained that the vast majority of censorship in China happens at the self-censorship level, ‘the filmmakers know what the parameters are, and they work within those parameters’. This is comparable with the U.S. self-censorship regime, The Production Code, which was a set of moral guidelines to determine what was acceptable or unacceptable for the U.S. audience. The High Ranking Industry Person (2018) recalled that some changes were required for the script for *The Great Wall* to pass the first stage of the censorship process. The initial draft was very specific in its time-period and location, and the censors noted that Chinese historians might find the historical inaccuracy aggravating (HRIP, 2018). By making the time-period less clear, it was possible to circumvent that problem. For example, the first subtitle in the initial draft said, ‘China 1119 AD’ but after amending, became ‘Medieval China’ (HRIP, 2018). This development epitomises the issue of Hollywood’s cultural appropriation. For a start, the term ‘medieval’ is not appropriate for a Chinese historical setting, instead signalling a Euro-centric context since the medieval period - or the Middle Ages - refers to a time in the history of Europe. By noting that “Chinese historians” might take issue with the film, the censors highlighted the issue of rewriting history. By responding to this by simply obscuring the details, the producers were circumventing the issue without addressing it. The impact of self-censorship, meanwhile, serves to perpetuate a creative disconnection between artistic freedom and state control. That is not to say that creativity is essentially stifled. The High Ranking Industry Person (2018) suggested that in general *The Great Wall* got through the censorship process ‘easily’ because it is a fantasy and is not political in any way. However, the term political has many meanings and while the High Ranking Industry Person may not necessarily have meant their comment to be taken literally the film is unavoidably political inasmuch as it is directly affiliated with the government: being made in conjunction with the China Film Group (CFG), a state-run enterprise, and being self-regulated by censorship guidelines, it is impossible to view the film as anything less than intrinsically political. The story itself

serves as a metaphor for transnational bipartisanship as will be shown in the thematic analysis in the next chapter.

One of the significant aspects of the production of *The Great Wall* was that it was to be shot entirely in China. The High Ranking Industry Person (2018) confirmed that the production was filmed by the Legendary East team and Bennett Walsh (2018) noted, ‘the mandate was to do it all in mainland China’ as opposed to other productions that filmed partially in the Chinese region. The reasons for the Chinese shoot were several-fold. Filming in China has already been established in this thesis as winning favour in Chinese markets, in addition to appeasing the Chinese government and being a requisite for co-productions. Additionally, in 2015 China was in the midst of a film studio production boom, during which real estate developers in China were building film studios, and supply was far outstripping demand (Frater, 2015a). As a result of this, the Chinese economy was heavily invested in establishing itself as a global production centre. With this in mind, *The Great Wall* presented an important opportunity to illustrate the developments in the Chinese film industry and prove that Chinese studios were capable of co-producing a Hollywood tentpole of immense scale, with a “Hollywood finish”. However, rather than proving the successful development of Chinese facilities, the location ended up being one of the project’s most problematic issues.

The insights of crew members interviewed for this research described China as an underdeveloped production centre, but it is important to frame these experiences as coming from individuals used to Hollywood industry practices and as an extension of the inherent bias towards Hollywood standards, which are assumed to be the correct and most sophisticated practices. Their experiences also serve to further expose the incongruity between the Chinese and Hollywood production practices. Bennett Walsh (2018) explained the difficulty of shooting such a large-scale production in China, which he described as an ‘underdeveloped production centre’, particularly with the high-level

of complexity that *The Great Wall* shoot required. Walsh (2018) described how they had to 'bring in a lot more' equipment for shooting, implying there were technical and technological deficits in Chinese production that needed filling with Hollywood technology and expertise. One of the major problems with co-productions or foreign productions that want to shoot in China is cost. Walsh (2018) noted that *The Great Wall* would have been far less expensive if they had taken out some of the 'complexity' and shot it somewhere else because of the amount of equipment and personnel that they had to transport over to China from the U.S. As noted by Eric Hedayat (2018), there are less costly places to shoot where there are also the lure of tax rebates, which means there is 'no point' in shooting in China unless you are trying to 'fulfil some obligations of a Chinese co-production' or attempting to 'cross-market the film significantly to China', as was the case with *The Great Wall*. Adam Wheatley (2018) said that he had 'crunched the numbers' and worked out that the popular myth that it is cheaper to film in China is false, which he attributed to the working attitude, noting that in his experience Chinese colleagues 'do nothing up until the last few weeks and then people are working around the clock', as well as the sheer size of the workforce - 'They can just throw bodies at it' - and the disproportionate pay rates, noting that Chinese colleagues are 'getting paid more than some people that I've worked with in Australia and New Zealand'. Of course, this is a perception of difference that is highly specific to Wheatley's experiences, and is also accounted for by the economics of production that dictate cultural and industrial norms.

The complexity of *The Great Wall* production process is evident in several key areas. Firstly, the film was a large-scale Hollywood tentpole, involving complex action sequences and effects. Secondly, the physical act of shooting in China and having to ship over requisite talent, equipment and so forth. Thirdly, the complexity of combining Chinese and U.S. production practices, cast and crew. Fourthly, the issue of linguistic and cultural translation and the task of combining cultures. Finally, playing to both markets. The issue of location was noted by Graham Stumpf (2018) who recalled the extensive

travel back and forth between China and the U.S. which made the post-production process particularly ‘immense’ due to the amount of travel and the time difference, ‘it was a show that I needed support on... it was definitely the most complex project I’ve done’.

The location of the shoot also had an impact on the casting. As Bennet Walsh (2018) described, ‘It’s a tall order to have somebody spend four months in China’ due to its relative remoteness. There was also the issue of environmental conditions. For example, due to the excessive amount of pollution in Beijing while the production was shooting, Walsh (2018) explained, ‘it was going to be a situation where the actors would not go out and spend six weeks in bad air in Beijing’ and as a result the shoot had to be moved to Qingdao, which led to increased costs. Eric Hedayat (2018) recalled the problem of the extreme Chinese weather as a result of the location being so far North in Beijing that it was too cold to let the concrete set properly when building the exterior Wall sets, so again the production had to be moved to Qingdao, which was a challenging and costly endeavour since the physical production involved so much complexity and the crew size was so large. Another issue was the remote nature of some of the locations, for example, the opening and closing of the film, was filmed out in the desert, in areas that were comparably remote and subject to extreme weather conditions. Hedayat (2018) also noted that, similar to anywhere else, there were issues with obtaining permits to film, which in this case meant that they were not able to shoot in the desert-based location ‘until right in the middle of summer, which is obviously the worst time to be there’ with heat and flash-flooding common at that time of year. However, as Hedayat (2018) noted, unpredictable or inhospitable shooting conditions are common in film production, which should be noted when considering the extremities faced on *The Great Wall* shoot.

In addition to the mandate for the shoot location, the film was also required to include a predominantly Chinese cast and crew. The first director to be associated with the project was an American director, Edward Zwick. Zwick was ultimately replaced by

Zhang Yimou in 2014. The choice of Zhang Yimou as director is significant for many reasons. Jon Jashni noted in an extra feature on the Blu-ray that Zhang was a 'perfect choice' for the task of combining Western filmmaking techniques with traditional Chinese culture. Zhang's standing as a Chinese auteur with international acclaim positioned him not only as an ideal choice to direct *The Great Wall*, but also as a symbol of the film's transnational capital. As Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu (1997: 105) notes,

The international popularity of Zhang's films conveniently thematises a set of interrelated main concerns of current cultural debates in China: the fate of Chinese national cinema in the condition of transnational capital, "cultural critique" and "cultural exhibitionism" in Fifth-Generation cinema, Third World cinema and Third World criticism, Orientalism, and Postcolonialism in Chinese style.

In this respect, Zhang is a symbol of the issues that complicated the film at a conceptual, contextual and material level. Ironically, Zhang was likely hired not for this reason, but rather to bring to the project his "Chineseness", legitimising a production that, as a supposed co-production, was hitherto helmed by almost exclusively North American producers and writers, and his "star quality" - his proven track record in the North American market with films like *Hero (Yīngxióng)* (2002) and *House of Flying Daggers (Shí Miàn Mái Fú)* (2004). As a member of China's Fifth Generation filmmakers, Zhang challenged the revolutionary heroism and melodrama of previous generations, adopting new wave cinematic techniques and producing films that were artistically subjective and focused on modern Chinese society. Zhang's adoption of new wave techniques is perhaps most noticeable in his films' use of striking cinematography and visual language. Yingjin Zhang (1997) suggests that Zhang's reliance on visual style positioned him to succeed in international markets - namely in the West. His experimental style, which often caused his earlier films to be banned in China, was often used to attract publicity in the West, and notably adopted an 'Orientalist' view of China, including themes of patriarchal repression, traditional architecture and sweeping wild locations. This, according to Zhang (1997), helps to account for Zhang's success in the North American

market. Several of Zhang's films have been at least partially backed by U.S. finance, and have comprised multinational production teams.

Zhang had a significant impact upon the casting for the film according to the High Ranking Industry Person (2018), who recalled that casting for the international roles in *The Great Wall* was very 'organic'. Pedro Pascal was a fan of Zhang Yimou and was approached following his memorable turn in *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019), Willem Dafoe was a perfect fit 'because of his art film background and because he has very international film taste and he lives in Italy', and Zhang was a 'huge fan' of Matt Damon. The casting of Matt Damon would, however, be the pre-emptive undoing of the film. Damon's casting was announced in 2015 to no fanfare but following the release of the first trailer in July 2016 there was an outcry of whitewashing (see for example Kelley, 2016; Wong, 2016, McClendon, 2016). As noted in the previous chapter, whitewashing is a process of problematic racialisation. Robert Miles (1993: 135) defined the concept of racialisation as a process whereby a group is signified as a 'distinct category or type of human being by reference to real or alleged biological characteristics.' As defined by John Gabriel (1998: 4), 'whitewash refers to both the process and works within a loose problematic of racialisation'. In filmmaking practice this refers to the process of casting white actors to portray non-white characters (Zhang, 2017), a process that is a result of Anglophone bias and Eurocentrism. Jaap Van Ginneken (2007: 231) observes that the 'white view of the world' represented in Hollywood blockbusters stems from the economic, social and racial status of filmmakers, who are predominantly 'from the middle class but become millionaires' and herald from 'major Anglophone settler states', and 'most are also white'. Ginneken makes the point that directors of Hollywood blockbusters are also young, and that lead actors are usually likewise young, which is attributed to sponsors and advertisers wanting 'young consumers with purchasing power in the main roles, and no real social problems in sight' (2007: 231). This type of representation often causes backlash and is of particular relevance to *The Great Wall*. It is imperative to view the backlash over Damon's casting in two significant contexts:

firstly the question of the difference between whitewashing and “white saviour” films, and secondly within the wider socio-political movement at the time, in particular the #OscarsSoWhite controversy of 2015 and 2016.

The distinction between whitewashing and the white saviour film is important in the case of *The Great Wall* because while there is evidence to accuse it of the latter, it is not a case of whitewashing. Damon’s character was always intended as a white character and is therefore not an example of a white actor cast as a non-white character. Responding to Damon’s casting controversy Zhang Yimou told *Variety*, ‘Matt Damon is not playing a role that was originally conceived for a Chinese actor. The arrival of his character in our story is an important plot point. There are five major heroes in our story, and he is one of them - the other four are Chinese’ (Zhang in McClendon, 2016). Where whitewashing refers to the casting of white actors in non-white roles, the ‘white saviour’ film is a term used to describe a cinematic trope in which a white character saves a non-white character (Hughey, 2014). This kind of narrative device reinforces the ideology of Western paternalism by positioning the white saviour’s morality as innate, and the non-white character as weak, either physically or ideologically. The extent to which *The Great Wall* fits this category will be discussed in the next chapter, but it is important to note the difference between the two concepts at this stage precisely because the initial accusations in Damon’s casting controversy were primarily accusations of whitewashing.

Damon’s casting was announced in March 2015 (Graser, 2015b), but it was not until over a year later in July 2016, when the first teaser trailer was released, that the casting was called into question, publicly. The trailer in question heavily features Damon’s character, amidst sweeping shots of the Great Wall, and contains only Damon’s character’s voiceover, informing the audience; ‘I was born into battle. I fought for greed and gods. This is the first war I’ve seen worth fighting for’ (Legendary, 2016). Damon is positioned front and centre, both aesthetically and narratively; since his is the only voice in the trailer and the narrative is told from his point of view (he is fighting a battle evidently to

defend the Great Wall) it fits comfortably into the white saviour trope. The accusation of whitewashing is - based on the trailer alone - also understandable since no explanation is given for Damon's character being where he is (in Ancient China, amidst predominantly Chinese characters) and given the subject of the film it is understandable that some may have assumed that his character was intended - at least at some stage - to be Chinese.

In addition to Zhang's response to the casting controversy, Damon also responded publicly, calling the accusations premature and blaming the scandal on the "clickbait era", which he suggested was the reason the scandal had so much weight behind it (Thorne, 2016; Pulver, 2016). Speaking at New York Comic Con in 2016, Damon spoke about his reaction to the controversy, stating that he took it very seriously, pointing out that the accusations were based on the back of a teaser trailer without knowing what the film was about,

if people watch the movie and still believe there's whitewashing involved in it, in a creature feature that we made up, then I will listen to it with my whole heart. And I will think about that and I will try to learn from it. I will be surprised if people watch it and have that reaction. I will be genuinely shocked. (Damon in CinemaBlend, 2016).

Both the actor and director's rebuttals are based on the conception of whitewashing as the casting of white actors in non-white roles, but another dimension of whitewashing is the dominant role of Caucasian characters in cinematic representation. As Xiaoqun Zhang notes, 'Caucasian actors are written as characters with ranging personalities, and most of the heroic characters have been played by them. This Hollywood practice has not been changed over a century' (2017: 321-322). This second type of whitewashing changes the term's meaning from casting white actors as non-white characters, "mis-casting whitewashing", to "white-dominance whitewashing". In this specific regard, the film can be accused of whitewashing. Although the High Ranking Industry Person confirmed that the cast of *The Great Wall* was made up of around eighty-five percent Chinese actors this number is misleading because the vast majority of the Chinese actors

were extras or cameos. The High Ranking Industry Person (2018) explained that the Willem Dafoe character (Ballard) was not in early drafts of the script but the decision was made to add an insider's perspective, someone who had been there for a long time to explain what was going on. That the film felt the need to have a Western character to anchor the Western audience members at all speaks to the issue of whitewashing. More specifically, it illustrates what Nancy Wang Yuen (2016: 29) terms 'Hollywood's colour-blind racism'. Yuen (2016: 49-50) suggests that Hollywood is ambivalent where diversity is concerned,

On the one hand, Hollywood purports to be an industry made up of progressive, open-minded artists who publicly condemn racism and support diversity. On the other hand, it is one of the most powerful and flagrant (even if unconscious) perpetrators of racism through exclusionary and stereotyped storytelling and casting practices.

In 2016 the lack of diversity in Hollywood was highlighted in the #OscarsSoWhite campaign. The campaign was started with a hashtag in 2015 by April Reign as a response to that year's Academy Award nominations in which every actor nominated in an acting category was white. When the same situation occurred at the 2016 Oscars, the hashtag campaign was revived and led to high profile celebrities speaking out and boycotting the award ceremony (Izundu, 2016b). Matt Damon was one of the white actors nominated in the 2016 Academy Awards for his role in *The Martian* (2015), meaning he was directly implicated in the #OscarsSoWhite campaign. And so, when the teaser trailer for *The Great Wall* was released, audiences were acutely aware of the issue of the lack of diversity in Hollywood films. It is also important to remember, however, that the star system has long-since been one of the techniques used by Hollywood to improve returns on films at the box office. According to big data studies on the determinants of box office, the casting of stars is just one indicator of box office success along with director reputation, targeted publicity, release time, award wins, budget and genre (e.g. Kwak and Zhang, 2011; Terry et al., 2008). For example, in their study on the determinants of foreign box office revenue for English-language films, Terry, Cooley and Zachary (2008) use regression analysis to identify U.S. domestic box office performance, action movies,

children's movies, sequels, Academy Award wins, and production budget as primary determinants. Subramaniaswamy et al. (2017) meanwhile suggest that more meaningful predictions should include additional data such as Wikipedia page views, trailer views, studio, critic reviews and review aggregate scores. Ana Suárez-Vázquez (2011) concludes in her study on individual cinema-goers that stars do not indicate quality per se, nor do they mitigate the potential effect of a negative review. However, the larger the budget for the film, the more important it is to ensure a return on investment, which makes casting a star all the more imperative. Matt Damon is not only a well-known actor in the U.S., but also in China where *The Martian* (2015) was a success (Brzeski, 2015d). Damon therefore presented a potential cross-over marketing tool. Indeed, the issue is more to do with the marketing of the film than with Damon's role itself, as will be discussed in the analysis of the film's marketing later in the chapter.

The Chinese casting was less contentious but had its own issues. Zhang Yimou and the High Ranking Industry person had a 'crazy idea' over dinner that they would put 'a major star in every role on the Chinese side', they made a list with a casting director of people they wanted and brought them in, telling them it was going to be 'an important film for China and might be internationally successful' and that they would play a smaller role than they would normally and that the pay would be relatively small, but that they would essentially be doing it as a favour (HRIP, 2018). None of these major Chinese stars were shown a script and they were not told who else was in the film to 'avoid any competitiveness' and they were not told who they were going to play until 'very close to their shooting days', the High Ranking Industry Person (2018) explained, 'luckily they were willing to do that to support the film'. This anecdote offers an insight into the casting process and its implications. As the first major Sino-U.S. blockbuster of this kind - directed by a Chinese director, filmed entirely in China with a majority Chinese cast and with the budget, technology and skills of Hollywood - on paper it marked an important opportunity for China to demonstrate the development and sophistication of its domestic film industry. If the project was a success this would prove that Chinese film

industry workers above- and below-the-line were capable of matching their U.S. counterparts and would lead to more productions of a similar nature. This in turn would give Chinese industry workers - including actors - more opportunities to work with Hollywood. All of this would give China a significant boost in their quest to produce films with an international appeal. However, in practice this kind of opaque, and somewhat unethical casting arrangement led to what critics of the film called a lack of character development in the Chinese characters (this criticism will be discussed in more length in the next chapter). Eric Hedayat (2018) recalled, 'we had a lot of what we call stunt casting, with cameos of very famous Chinese people. Even the guy that played the drums in that whole drum sequence is one of the biggest stars in China, as a musician. There were a lot of people that if you were in China people would go, "oh my god that's so-and-so" [Leehom Wang] and we had no idea'. Stunt casting is a legitimate means of marketing films and providing entertainment for viewers, but in this instance because the Chinese actors were not famous in the North American market, the marketing value did not exist outside of the Chinese market. This presented an obstacle because Hollywood tentpoles rely on star power as a marketing and publicity tool.

Another motive for casting big stars in smaller roles was noted by the High Ranking Industry Person (2018) who pointed out that, in China, smaller supporting role actors tend not to be at the 'same level' as the stars and this can create a discrepancy in the quality of acting. *The Great Wall* involved a large number of small roles and so, by casting famous actors in minor roles, it was possible to 'smooth out the level of performance and ensure every performance was going to be solid'. Eric Hedayat (2018) noted a practical implication; that it is getting 'increasingly more difficult in China to get actors because they're getting so popular'. Asking stars to take smaller roles and giving them very little notice may have made it easier to secure talent at that time because there was less of a demand on their time. The casting of Jing Tian also raised eyebrows in China. According to Jonathan Landreth (2018), 'there was an enormous stir-up on the Chinese internet about how the hell did she get that role where there are so many other

folks who might have elevated that role to a different place. There was just a lot of backstabbing around her casting'. Very little is known about Jing Tian and her meteoric rise, particularly in Legendary films (she was cast in *Kong: Skull Island* (2017) and *Pacific Rim: Uprising* (2018)), which has led to questions around the reasons for her casting (Landreth, 2017a). Since there is a lack of reliable evidence as to what the issue was with her casting it means any deductions rely on speculation, however, it is interesting that, rather than rely on one of the many extremely popular Chinese film stars, Legendary chose to cast the relatively unknown actress.

The pre-production process, including the idea, the script, the appointment of Zhang Yimou as director and the casting process reveals many of the problems inherent in *The Great Wall*. Issues around cultural appropriation, problematic aspirations, practical and market distinctions and incompatibilities therein served to complicate the project. These concerns continue to be evidenced in the production process, along with concerns of cultural and linguistic translation and interpretation.

Production and Post-Production

The bulk of my interview data is centred on the experiences of Hollywood industry personnel during the production process of *The Great Wall*. I was interested, in the main, in asking my interviewees about what was different about the production of *The Great Wall* in comparison to other Hollywood productions they had worked on, or other co-productions. Matt Stahl (2009: 54) identifies two sets of key concerns implicit in the study of media production labour; the 'subjective' and the 'structural'; 'the social-psychological experience of work on the one hand, and its political economic conditions and organisation on the other hand'. In this light, my interview data revealed significant insights into both the subjective and structural aspects of the working conditions on *The Great Wall* and their implications for the prospect of future co-productions. These

concerns are best viewed as complications of transnationalism resulting from a multinational labour team, and as evidence of the nuanced power and practical implications of the New International Division of Cultural Labour (NICL) outlined by Miller et al. (2005). Existing work by Aynne Kokas (2017) has examined the ways in which above-the-line (“proactive” workers e.g. directors, producers, writers and lead actors) and below-the-line (“reactive” workers - the rest of the production team) workers impact Sino-U.S. film production. Kokas asserts that above-the-line workers serve to *brand* Hollywood-China co-productions, complicating ‘the idea of a spatial or national understanding of the media industries’ by working to negotiate between the two cultures of industrial production, and at the same time working to promote individual productions ‘they need only be connected to the process and their peers - not a particular location, nation, or even source of capital’ (2017: 110). This is in line with the principles of the NICL where productions, particularly, depend upon the international dimensions of production to make a film in the most cost effective way, for as wide an audience as possible (Miller et al., 2005). Below-the-line workers, meanwhile, have a different set of considerations. Kokas’ (2017) work suggests that these workers *shape* Sino-U.S. filmmaking, contributing to an ecosystem that contends primarily with issues of translation of language, culture and space. It is the inner-workings of this below-the-line production ecosystem and the issue of translation, both cultural and linguistic, that thematically dominate my interview data.

The High Ranking Industry Person (2018) detailed the timeline for *The Great Wall*, with pre-production taking place between July 2014 to March 2015, filming between March 2015 and August 2015 and then post-production spanning August 2015 to November 2016. Speaking about the difference between the Chinese and American production systems, Eric Hedayat (2018) noted that it ‘took some work’ to integrate the two ‘because both parties are competent in the way they make films, but they do not make them the same way’. This goes back to the fundamental differences in the way each country’s film industry has evolved according to the wider political, economic and social

factors outlined in the introduction to this thesis. Adam Wheatley (2018), who has worked on Chinese productions as well as Hollywood and Hollywood-China projects, noted, 'It's very different. It's not the Hollywood system, that's for sure, which is what we're all pretty much used to'. Here Wheatley is signalling not only the difference between the two, but also the idea that the Hollywood system is the common language of film production, inasmuch as it is the most widely used system, as exemplified by Wheatley, who has worked in other contexts than Hollywood. This supports academic and industrial commentary that suggests that Hollywood is the dominant authority in the film industry.

Both the Chinese and Hollywood film industries have been through many permutations largely dictated by social and political and economic events as outlined earlier in the thesis but had very different trajectories. One of the significant differences between the two industries is their financial capital. Hollywood has historically been the most financially lucrative of the global film industries. Consequently, the technology and techniques that Hollywood productions employ include the most cutting edge innovations, whereas China had, until recently, not had access to these technologies. Eric Hedayat (2018) noted that, because of this, Chinese colleagues are 'kind of more old school; they'll do a lot more things with physical labour that we would do in our countries with machine labour.' This raises another distinct difference between the two systems in their reliance on technology versus labour. Hedayat (2018) explains that the Chinese team would 'tend to get very heavy manpower-wise on crews because it's cheaper to have ten guys versus a new piece of equipment. They did not even have the equipment, so that was always one struggle. We were always trying to balance the manpower' (Hedayat, 2018), or what Adam Wheatley (2018) referred to as 'throwing bodies' at things, which also had practical implications. Hedayat pointed out the problem of organising and feeding an 'army of people every day'. Miller et al. (2005: 115) note in their work on Global Hollywood that all aspects of 'Hollywood work' have been 'transformed' by new technologies. In addition, one of the characteristics of

Hollywood labour since the demise of the classical studio system is that of a shift in the model of employment from ‘company employees’ to ‘freelance, franchised or casualised labour’ (McRobbie, 2002: 98). The China Film Group, who represented the Chinese crew on *The Great Wall*, have not made this transition in labour mode and still retain permanent staff, rather than freelance workers. The issue of technology versus ‘manpower’ identified by Hedayat in the production of *The Great Wall* exemplifies both of these things. Hedayat (2018) also recalled an issue with construction on set whereby the U.S. team would design elements to be made from steel and the Chinese would use bamboo or concrete or brick instead, ‘something that’s different from what we would normally approach something with. So, there was a little bit of an issue with getting sets built the way we needed them’. Hedayat (2018) offered an example of this discrepancy in that the Chinese team on *The Great Wall* not only had a different system but also were reluctant to ‘embrace’ the Hollywood techniques, which made aspects of the shoot problematic for the Hollywood team,

When we were on the stages [China Film Group] were particular about how they wanted to go about making things versus how we would normally. Like with wild walls, for example, wild wall²... is such a standard and critical element for us, particularly on a smaller set, and the Chinese were really reluctant to embrace that. And they often build sets to scale, which we do not do...So it’s not the smoke and mirrors that we would do when we build something.

This ‘reluctance’ to embrace Hollywood techniques and technologies is unsurprising given that they were unfamiliar to the Chinese crew. But Hedayat also highlights a very practical issue in the relationship: the work is made harder by the incongruity between the systems.

As noted by Weiying Peng (2016), in very recent years co-productions have emphasised collaboration from the beginning to the end, meaning Chinese partners are involved in

² Wild wall is a movable wall that is mobile, allowing for movement and to achieve camera angles.

the project from script development to distribution. Peng (2016) asserts that this model, which was used on *The Great Wall*, is an advantage for the integration of different production styles and the promotion of Chinese culture but also notes that the huge differences in film markets, business culture and language still pose great challenges for Hollywood and China to collaborate successfully. Co-productions like *The Great Wall* necessarily involve not only the combination of production systems, but also of two very different production cultures. Adam Wheatley (2018) noted that, in his experience, the Chinese crew members were not as focused on deadlines as the Hollywood team, and he attributed this to the notion that being on the payroll rather than paid as a freelance worker meant that the longer the job lasted, the more they would get paid. Wheatley (2018) shared, ‘it’s very much about “what I can extract from this production? If it gets finished, then that’s good but if it does not it’s like as long as I can make as much money as possible”’. Wheatley (2018) explained further,

Your Producers on a Chinese film, if it’s a pure Chinese production and not a co-production, a lot of the time they’re not really that interested as to whether the film gets made. They’re more interested in making as much money out of it for as long as possible and if the film shoots and it gets finished then that’s okay but then if it doesn’t then they’ve made their money and they’ll just move onto another production if it goes under. Whereas if I’m working with a team of people in different areas on another production, everyone’s working for the same purpose; to get the film finished.

The discrepancy between the two production cultures as experienced by Wheatley may be explained by the remuneration factor but may also have something to do with the Chinese and American film industries having functioned very differently historically. In the U.S. the film industry is a system of mass production where investments made in films “expect” returns just as in any industry. In China, where the industry has been underdeveloped until recently, filmmakers and studios are still establishing themselves, their techniques, their storytelling and their infrastructure and, during this phase, it stands to reason there may be some failures along the way and there are, of course,

plenty of Hollywood films that fail to get made. However, what is surprising about Wheatley's experience is the scale at which this appears to be the case. Wheatley also described experiences of witnessing signs of money laundering and bribery on set, which might explain the willingness to seemingly 'waste' time and resources on productions that do not reach fruition. For example, Wheatley (2018) explained that, 'the Chinese, generally, their system is they have people up the top, like they have Art Directors, and they'll have people that work below them and the Art Director will usually bring their own team of people in with them and he will usually take a percentage of each of their wages, as a general rule'. Wheatley (2018) continues, 'when you come in from the West and you come into China and you go into these systems, if it's a co-production even...it's all about negotiation and business, and it's also about making a few extra dollars or RMB wherever possible. So they have little systems in place, which can really throw an American on their ear'. Here, Wheatley is observing not only a difference between the production cultures and their management of human resources but also highlights the impact this has on the production ecosystem.

China is traditionally a hierarchical society, particularly in state-run institutions, owing to the top-heavy and deeply embedded structure of the Chinese Communist Party. This hierarchy can also be found in the production ecosystem on *The Great Wall*. Wheatley (2018) highlighted the significance of obstacles relating to a deeply hierarchical workforce, explaining that in Chinese film crews there is 'very much a system of hierarchy' wherein 'certain people won't speak to other people who are below them' and that communication between departments is difficult. Wheatley (2018) also noted that there is a cultural sensitivity around notions of 'respect'. He recalled that on occasion he had unintentionally offended people when he reached 'saturation point'. Wheatley (2018) identifies an array of issues: the issue of communication between departments and across hierarchical divides, the issue of offending colleagues as a result of cultural sensitivity, and a resulting frustration in the ecosystem. Wheatley (2018) explained, 'I've found Americans have the most difficulty in working in these

environments because they are very much about Hollywood and this is how we do things in Hollywood and if you do not do it like this then... I always say to them, “you’re not in Kansas anymore, Dorothy”’. Here, by singling out North American production personnel as struggling to understand the Chinese system, Wheatley further highlights a discontinuity between the systems and a distinct rigidity and discomfort on the U.S. side when being confronted with a different system.

The contrasting histories of the industries, their access to money, technology and creative freedom, have led to divergent expectations of quality or “finish”, which was cited as a key differentiator by several of the interviewees. Wheatley (2018) explained, ‘a lot of the time on a Chinese film you’ll get things to about the seventy-five to eighty-five percent finished mark. So almost like what television quality used to be is where they’ll finish and go, “ok finished”. And then where a foreign person will come into play is, they’ll extract that extra fifteen to twenty percent so that you can get the movie quality finish’. Wheatley (2018) also noted that traditional crew roles are different in China and that ‘usually you have to wear a few more hats, as a general rule’. Speaking about the differences, Eric Hedayat (2018) pointed out that ‘anywhere you go’, different places and industries have different systems,

you’ll always have a little bit of a different thing than what we’ve established as what we call Hollywood... Everyone has their different twist on things. Whether it’s little things like who puts the license plates on cars being props versus transport to much bigger things. So, China also has a history of filmmaking and they’ve done it their way for a long time, and we’ve done it our way for a long time.

In this sense, co-productions can act as opportunities for industries to learn from one another. Jonathan Landreth (2018) pointed this out in his interview; ‘certainly there are still best practices, many of which were adopted in attempts at co-productions’. Chris Bremble (2018) highlighted another difference in attitudes towards money, whereby Western clients tend to be very focused on the economic health of their vendors as well as the healthy management of human resources, ‘they don’t want you to run out of

money in the middle of a show, they do not want you to burn your artists out in the middle of a show'. Whereas, Bremble explained, 'in the mainland market, that is not the case. It's not that they're impolite, it's that they're under-informed about what the work may entail'. The issue of being under-informed also manifested in a 'lack of preparation', particularly in the pre-production phase, according to Bremble (2018) and Wheatley (2018). Bremble (2018) recalled being approached by another project (not *The Great Wall*) that had already shot and edited the film without having a visual effects company involved in the pre-production, production, or editorial process, that wanted visual effects on 'eight hundred shots and they needed the work done in six weeks'. Bremble (2018) added that the shoot had used ill-advised equipment and had resulted in 'a whole bunch of messes'; 'we took one look and said, "we can't help you"'. Wheatley's experience of working with a Chinese team further revealed this lack of preparation, he noted, 'I used to call [Chinese colleagues] the Masters of Random. They work seven days a week, so I ended up having to work seven days a week because you'd have a Sunday off, and you'd come in on the Monday and you walk around the sets and you go, "what the hell's happened? What happened?" and they'll say, "we just thought" and it's like "you have not thought all week and then I have a day off and you've done this, and you've just ruined it"' (Wheatley, 2018). Chinese processes, Wheatley (2018) explained, only work for Chinese productions, which he referred to as 'chaos theory incorporated'. This indicates the perceived difference between the sophistication of the film production practices of the Chinese and Hollywood industries. Wheatley explained with reference to the design processes, that his Chinese counterparts did not have, for example, the level of conceptual thinking required to create purposeful designs. Wheatley's experience reaffirms a dominant discourse that circulates through the trade press that Hollywood is superior to China, when it is actually just a different way of working. It is also an example of the types of translocal activities that take place in co-productions when practitioners from different locations come work together, forming a process of adaptation (in this case, adaptation of practical processes) that - as Oaks and Schein (2006) note - involve identification with an "other". Furthermore, Wheatley's

observations are indicative of the industrial histories of the Chinese and Hollywood film industries. There is a longer history of mass systemic production in the west, which has of course influenced and developed Hollywood practices in ways that the Chinese film industry is more recently accustomed to.

Another problem resulting from the different systems and languages was an issue concerning how directions were interpreted. For example, as Chris Bremble (2018) noted that John Myhre, the Production Designer on *The Great Wall* and a Hollywood veteran, despite his wealth of experience, had no experience of building sets in China, 'so there was a Chinese production designer who would look at John's work and interpret it, for China. Which is how we would build them'. Bremble (2018) added, 'that made the process at the beginning really exciting and interesting, but in the middle, difficult, and in the end very sour'. This quote is emblematic of the entire process of the production of *The Great Wall*; taking a Hollywood film idea to a Chinese team, who interpreted it for Chinese production, and produced it that way. As an idea, and at the start of the project, this was anticipated to develop the new blueprint for Sino-U.S. co-productions, but in practice the actual process of combining production efforts in this way proved difficult and finally, incompatible, which is also reflected in the critical and audience response to the film.

Perhaps the most significant pitfall in the attempt to combine the systems and cultures was that they spoke different languages. The issue of translation played a very large role in the production of *The Great Wall*. In his interview, Graham Stumpf (2018) noted the complexity of dubbing and subtitling the film into multiple languages with characters speaking English and Chinese. But the bigger issue regarding translation was that of the language barrier that existed on set. As Bennett Walsh (2018) noted, 'the thing that made [*Great Wall*] entirely unique was that our director was Zhang Yimou, who did not speak English, who is a master, but we were guiding through this process where most of

the department heads were Western, or English-speaking people'. Bennett (2018) highlighted the problem of translation, noting;

miscommunication is the one thing that is chronic in film production that you try to guard against because it's a creative process with a lot of people and creativity is very subjective. So, when you say you want a red apple, it can be many different things. You're constantly just trying to deliver the vision of the director.

In a Blu Ray extra feature Damon described experiencing a difficulty on set with having to receive Zhang's direction through a translator; 'It's challenging because stuff can take longer because [of] translation. That creative dialogue takes longer.' In cases like these, creative dialogue, which is already open to interpretation (and misinterpretation), has to undergo the additional linguistic and cultural translation, leaving more room for misinterpretation and taking extra time on set, which creates an issue of cost. This issue was also evidenced by Walsh (2018) who identified flaws in the *process* of translation on set. Walsh (2018) described an over-abundance of translators, 'we had probably forty-two translators on set, which is a big problem because you lose a lot in translation and you're watching out for that all the time'. Jillian Share (2018) remembered, 'it was difficult because, you know, you have tons of translators everywhere and everybody speaks a different language', which complicated matters. The multiplicity of translators is an indicator of the incongruity between the Chinese and Hollywood crews. If so, many translators were necessary, and if each translator was interpreting creative direction and then that translation was itself being interpreted, especially when the two production systems are so different, the opportunities for misinterpretation are multiplied. Chris Bremble (2018) described how this translation chain and, specifically, the cross-cultural interpretation, was problematic;

Zhang Yimou would give a note, the note would go to the visual effects supervisor, that would go through the studio, Legendary, to ILM [Industrial Light and Magic] in San Francisco, to ILM in Singapore and then to Base in Beijing. And very often by the time we got the note it was not exactly - or sometimes not even close - to what Zhang Yimou had requested because of the cultural

interpretation of what he wanted. So, there were times when the notes were misunderstood, there were times when the notes were simply contradicted. So we ended up getting into an experience where we would have him sneak into our office and tell us what he really wanted, which was easier for him and more comfortable for him.

Here, as well as highlighting the issues of misinterpretation, Bremble also observes that the process of translation was also used to redirect or even contradict the director. The friction between creative decisions and financial restrictions - or between the director and the studio - is well accounted for. Janet Wasko (2003: 50) notes,

creative decisions inevitably will be influenced by the availability of funds. In addition, the clout or power of various players has enormous influence on decision-making on the set. Perhaps not surprisingly, the involvement of producers, investors or studio representatives (collectively called The Suits) is often claimed to have a chilling effect on the creative process.

Furthermore, Wasko notes that decisions regarding 'what is shot (or not shot)' are made by 'those in positions of power' (2003: 55). In the case of *The Great Wall*, this power imbalance was further complicated or magnified by the obstacle of the language barrier. The interpretation necessary to translate directives provided an opportunity for the "Suits" to control the decision-making process. Furthermore, processes of translation impact the production ecosystem. Aynne Kokas (2017: 136) observes, 'while above-the-line workers on Sino-US film co-productions engage with translation work related to script development and production negotiations, below the line workers must navigate multiple spoken dialects of Chinese and English on a daily basis'. Kokas notes the obstacles that language and dialect play in the growth of production-labour networks, explaining, 'the use or misuse of a particular language or dialect by film crews can...encourage or discourage collaborations between different groups on a particular film shoot' (2017: 136). Kokas examines the role of the translator in the Hollywood-China production ecosystem, noting 'theoretical explorations of the role of a translator in literature recall the Italian adage "*traduttore, traditore*" (translator, traitor), suggesting

that even translators who seek to be faithful to the text are, by definition, still disloyal in their representation of it' (2017: 139). Thus, the process of interpretation is subjective and therefore open to interpretation and manipulation.

Graham Stumpf (2018) also described the experience of not being able to speak directly (i.e. without a translator) with Zhang Yimou as one of the 'day-to-day complexities' on the film. Stumpf confirmed that Zhang had the same translator with him at all times, who translated direction to the actors on set as well as to Stumpf and his team in the post-production process. By limiting the number of interpreters, the possibility of misinterpretation is reduced. Stumpf (2018) recalled that, although he saw Zhang Yimou every day, it 'felt so formal speaking with him' because their communication had to take place through a translator. Stumpf said that he tried to learn some Chinese words - thank you, hello - but that the language barrier prevented them from building up a more casual rapport which would have been possible if they had been able to have a more informal dialogue or 'passing conversations'. The failure of the U.S. crew to learn any Mandarin is an indication of a broader reluctance on the U.S. side to properly embrace the cross-cultural components of the project. The undertaking of learning a new language is perhaps unrealistic, but there was clearly an expectation on the U.S. side for Chinese partners to learn the American ways of doing things, which further demonstrates the imbalance of power. Wendy Su (2017: 488) notes the issue of language in Hollywood-China co-productions is one of 'culture, mutual understanding and common ground' and that for them to succeed they need to be familiar with both sides.

Bennett Walsh (2018) also noted that the issue of translation is 'not always a linguistic problem, it's a cultural issue, meaning it's Eastern thought versus Western thought' alluding to the issue of cultural translation, on top of linguistic translation. One example of this was highlighted by Graham Stumpf (2018) who recounted that the Chinese team did not like to use email in communications, preferring instead to use WeChat;

There was this idea that the Chinese did not use email very much and we had to use WeChat. And I was like, what?

You want me to text you? I'll never be able to find anything again?" That was really interesting. And they'd say, "well, you can send an email, but it might not be read for a couple of months".

This particular issue has both practical and symbolic implications. From a practical perspective, as Stumpf points out, email is a standard form of communication in Western business practice, particularly because it offers a paper trail and is easily organised, which text messages do not allow for. But in China, WeChat is an application that is a leading communication tool for more than a billion monthly active users (Hollander, 2018) and is considered the 'app for everything' (Birkinshaw et al., 2019) because it combines a multitude of services. Ultimately this is a question of cultural preferences.

The differences between the production systems and cultures and the issue of translation and interpretation necessitated an ongoing negotiation between the Chinese and Hollywood crew. Eric Hedayat (2018) noted; 'you could call it negotiation, or battle. It was certainly constant'. These negotiations appear, from the Hollywood side, to be divided into two categories: cooperation and leadership. With regards to the issue of leadership, despite the film purporting to combine the efforts of Chinese and American production personnel in partnership, Eric Hedayat (2018) noted that, in practice, the Western team took the lead. Hedayat (2018) explained that this created an issue; 'we didn't have a construction foreman or a construction person from the West because all the sets were being built by the Chinese, so we had U.S production designer, art designers from around the world and a few Chinese art directors...and frankly that was probably the biggest hurdle'. Here Hedayat highlights not only the incongruity between the systems, but also that, *because* of the incompatibility, it was not possible for the Western team to lead efficiently. The incompatibility between the systems and production cultures suggests that one system or person would need to take control in order for the production to succeed, but in practice this was a very difficult task. Hedayat (2018) described the frustrations, 'the production designer was in my office more than

once with his head in his hands'. There is an implication that because of the commonly expressed assumption that the Hollywood system is the gold standard, the person - or system - that would take the lead would be the Hollywood side.

Adam Wheatley (2018) highlighted this negotiation and the need to be open-minded on some occasions and resolute on others, making it clear to his construction managers that he had to approve any processes used and that if he did not approve them, there was no scope for negotiation. Wheatley (2018) noted the value of being 'open to suggestions, always open to suggestions, except for when there's no time', adding,

I'll let [a Chinese colleague] show me a process for construction or sculpture or for concept or whatever. I'll give a little bit of freedom...otherwise I just bring it back to these [Hollywood] systems and I always just say to them, "look, I use these systems because they work, they work elsewhere, and they've worked for a very long time and they've been working for nearly a hundred years of filmmaking so that's why we do these certain things". Because in the beginning I made the mistake of trying to be a little bit more diplomatic.

Wheatley (2018) noted that with co-productions such as *The Great Wall*, 'it's very easy to make it work if you implement the right processes'; 'if everyone's on the same page and you choose a particular system, I think that's one of the things that could overcome a lot of the problems which occur. And it's like you can remove that at the very beginning so you do not have a lot of these problems'. It is worth noting that Wheatley, as a New Zealander who has worked on Hollywood productions as well as Chinese productions, was the only interviewee that offered this kind of reconciliation. However, given Wheatley's exposure to the two systems individually as well as in collaboration, his assertion that you need to pick one or the other rather than combine the two is particularly interesting since it reaffirms the suggestion this thesis has made regarding their incompatibility (this will be revisited in the next chapter). This incompatibility reveals the complexity of transnational filmmaking, identifying an obstacle within

transnational order identified by Chris Berry (2010) as it problematises transborder film-making activities.

As Wendy Su (2017: 489) highlights, a co-production is 'always a process of negotiation'. Graham Stumpf (2018) noted the benefits of cooperation; 'having people on both sides of the exchange greatly helped in being able to talk. We felt we were in each other's camps and that just made it work well'. Stumpf (2018) also made the point that locality is also key and that having Legendary offices in China made things work more easily. Stumpf noted, 'I can't imagine being able to effectively go through the post-production process without having a company branch in China to deal with many of the assets and things we had to deal with during post-production' (such as the recording of ADR (Automated Dialogue Replacement) and the travel back and forth between the US and China). Stumpf (2018) had a friend who was working at a studio in China who taught him 'a great deal; to understand not only where these places were but what I could expect there and that kind of thing'. This process describes the kinds of collaborative work undertaken by below-the-line cultural intermediaries. Aynne Kokas notes the crucial role played by below-the-line cultural intermediaries; 'communities of industrial media workers who co-evolve with their environment' (2017: 133). Stumpf (2018) noted, regarding negotiation, that what usually brought about a resolution was the realisation that a compromise or adopting a different position was 'beneficial to the process'. Stumpf (2018) recalled that he enjoyed the process of cultural negotiation; 'I needed to mediate that and try to understand both sides. But I actually really enjoy being in that position. It was like, trying to really bridge the culture, you know? The business cultures.' The differences in the 'business culture' are reflected in Adam Wheatley's (2018) experience of corruption in the production process of *The Great Wall*. This manifested in terms of the film's budget - which Wheatley said had accounted for 'under-the-table deals' and 'bribery' allowances. Wheatley explained that networking in the Chinese film industry often involved getting to know or work with people you understand to be 'dodgy' and making allowances for that. It also manifested on set; Wheatley described

an experience on a Chinese production (not *The Great Wall*) where, as the production went on, one of the Line Producers began wearing expensive clothing and driving an expensive car.

Wheatley (2018) explained one of the main things he learned from the production process of *The Great Wall* was ‘patience’; ‘because you’re working really, really long hours’, and you, ‘reach saturation point’ and ‘lose your cool’, which can offend Chinese colleagues due to the culture difference and you have to apologise, ‘not necessarily for the content but definitely the delivery’. Wheatley’s experience exemplifies his role as a below-the-line level “transnational assistant”. Aynne Kokas (2017: 149) observes the ‘rise of a subculture of transnational “assistants” who act as bridges between spaces, languages and filmmaking cultures’. For Kokas, transnational assistants are below-the-line workers, as distinguished from above-the-line cultural intermediaries. Pierre Bourdieu defines cultural intermediaries as workers involved in the ‘presentation and representation’ and institutions that provide ‘symbolic goods and services’ (1984: 359), whose defining characteristic is their ‘control over the mass media’ (1984: 325). Wheatley, who has experience of working in and for both Chinese and Hollywood productions, as well as other countries, exemplifies the role of a transnational assistant. These types of workers utilise transferable cross-cultural competence and cross-cultural knowledge and contribute towards what Kokas (2017: 154) refers to as ‘the daily cultural translation work of below-the-line workers’ that ‘create continuity within and between projects that shape understanding between global production partners’. Documenting and analysing the experiences of crew members like Wheatley who have both the experience and the objective distance of working with both production cultures but hailing from neither are a valuable perspective on the collaboration process.

At a certain point Stumpf and the post-production team needed to submit the film to the Chinese censorship board for their feedback. Stumpf (2018) described how he was ‘walked through’ the censorship process by Legendary personnel who had been through

it before and was required to integrate these submission dates into the schedule; the first submission enabled the censorship board to vet for any sensitive or undesirable content and the second (and final) submission to the Chinese censors was a technical censorship process whereby all of the master copies that were going to be used for distribution in China went through a Quality Control review process by the government body. Once the censorship body had given the final approval the film was released in China with a special logo on the head of the film ‘a dragon logo at that time’ to prove that the film had gone through the process. This process was problematised by the Chinese censors requiring an unwatermarked copy of the film. Stumpf (2018) explained that, in order to thwart the illegal copying of films, copies are watermarked with the recipients initials so that it is traceable. However, Stumpf recalled with *The Great Wall*, ‘we were not allowed to put any sort of watermarks on the pre-released versions of the film that we sent through the censorship process. And that was a big worry for us; to send non-watermarked material’. Stumpf explained,

that was the mandate from the board in China and Legendary had, had that discussion back-and-forth with previous films and they basically said, “there’s no way around it, we need to do this”. And so that was kind of like a rule that we had that we sort of had to break to deal with the way it works in China.

This breaking of rules further exemplifies the incompatibility between the systems (‘there is no way around this’), which complicates trans-border filmmaking practices and restructures or complicates the transnational order. Crucially, this particular renegotiation of power, in which Legendary broke a fundamental Hollywood rule regarding copyright protection, demonstrates the power shift during the third phase of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship in which Hollywood adapted its procedures, policies and products to appeal to or appease Chinese regulatory bodies. In the case of *The Great Wall* the censorship board took precedence over possible intellectual property infringement.

Marketing

So far, this thesis has highlighted some of the differences in marketing in the U.S. compared with in China and the benefits of co-productions within a marketing context have been distinguished. The key difference between the two strategies is the use of online marketing techniques in China versus the traditional P&A (print and advertising) approach in the North American markets. In the US, traditional P&A is still used as the primary marketing strategy. P&A refers to the prints (either physical or digital) of the film itself and the promotional activities designed to promote the film (advertising). The advertising in traditional P&A is focused on trailers and images that are typically shown on television and in cinemas, outdoors (on transport, billboards, etc.) on radio and online. Whereas in China, the advertising is almost entirely online (Liao, 2018). This crucial differentiation is indicative of several key factors including the size of China's internet population, the monopolisation of online ticketing companies and social media apps, and the fact that China omitted the traditional P&A techniques which the U.S. is still relies on. In short, the use - or primacy - of the internet is what distinctly characterises the marketing of films in China. *The Great Wall* exemplifies these strategies. One of the significant differences between the Chinese and non-Chinese cast on the film is their social media presence. Joseph Liao (2018) noted that the popular Chinese cast had large numbers of followers on Weibo, which facilitated a 'huge social media presence'. As a prime example, Wang Junkai (the Emperor) set the Guinness World Record for "most reposts of a Weibo post" in 2015 with a post thanking his fans for their birthday wishes and dedicating a song to them (Swatman and Martin, 2015). At the time of the release of the film, nine of the Chinese cast members had social media accounts that were used to promote the film. By comparison, the Hollywood cast members had a small fraction of the reach of the Chinese cast; Pedro Pascal was the only cast member with a social media presence anywhere. This contrast between Chinese and North American celebrities involved in *The Great Wall* and their attitudes towards social media is explained by two key considerations. Firstly, the age range of

the cast members. The majority of the Chinese cast were aged between 17 and 35, while Pedro Pascal was the youngest of the non-Chinese cast at 42. Social media is understood to be more popular among younger age demographics (Ortiz-Ospina, 2017), and it therefore stands to reason that younger cast members are more likely to have a social media account and attract followers. The second key factor is the different use of social media marketing in the two territories. As Chris Bremble (2018) pointed out,

I think in some ways Hollywood has to learn from what's happening in China, where eighty percent of tickets are purchased on mobile phones and the mobile device is the primary method with which studios market their movies and it's very cost-effective. There are no big billboards, newspaper ads, etcetera, in China. They're engaged in social culture.

Part of the reason that Chinese marketing companies have been developing social media marketing is because the comparatively latent commercialisation of the Chinese film industry occurred in tandem with the rise of the internet and social media. In this sense, Chinese marketing is not inhibited by outdated P&A practices and instead is able to adapt to and make use of innovative social media connections. Hollywood recognises and makes use of China's advanced and lucrative social media marketing as perhaps most notably demonstrated by Lu Han's involvement in promoting Hollywood films. Lu Han is an extremely popular Chinese singer and actor. His celebrity influence in the Chinese territories is immense; in particular the way that he uses social media to galvanise his fanbase. His influence over his vast online fanbase has been coined as "the Lu Han effect" (Global Times, 2017). As well as his strategic casting in *The Great Wall*, Lu acted as an 'ambassador' for *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (Brzeski, 2015e), even though he was not in the film, and released a promotional song for the film, as well as for *Kung Fu Panda 3* (2016). Lu's personal branding and his cultivation of a sizable social media influence made him a lucrative marketing strategy for *The Great Wall* in China. By lending his personal brand to the film - and by extension, Legendary - Lu enabled an opportunity for developing brand anthropomorphism. Guido and Peluso (2015: 3) define brand anthropomorphism as 'the extent to which a branded product is perceived as an

actual human being.’ The authors explain, ‘an anthropomorphic perception of branded products might occur to the extent to which consumers perceive such product as congruent to how they view themselves actually, ideally, or socially (for example, a product whose image is consistent with an actual or ideal personality trait of consumers)’ (Guido and Peluso, 2015: 3). Brand anthropomorphism is particularly beneficial to post-postclassical Hollywood studios, since their entire identity rests in their branding. As this thesis has already established, Legendary’s brand was constructed as a fanboy brand - inherently associated with fanboys through the use of Thomas Tull’s personal branding. In their study assessing celebrity endorsement effects in China, Hung et al. (2011: 18) found that ‘consumer-celebrity relations are salient behavioural antecedents for endorser effects.’ Specifically, the authors draw a link between China’s ‘collectivist cultural values’ (Hung et al., 2011) and ‘celebrity-worship’ tendencies, which are magnified in the Generation Y (those born after 1980); ‘a generation of “little emperors” and “little empresses” resulting from the enactment of China’s One Child Policy in 1979’ who have ‘significant power to consume and, increasingly, has become brand- and fashion-conscious’ (Hung et al., 2011: 7). These generational tendencies are directly aligned with the fanboy brand, and therefore Legendary, making the use of celebrity endorsements an obvious tactic for Legendary and *The Great Wall*.

Another of the stark differences between social media in China versus in the U.S. that helps explain their different usage of social media marketing is the relative monopoly of a small number of platforms in China, and their geographic concentration. While China does not have access to the key Western social media platforms - Facebook, Instagram and Twitter - unless using a VPN, the Chinese social media alternatives are almost unused outside of China. In 2018, Facebook was the social media platform with the highest number of monthly active users (MAU) reaching 2.27 billion MAUs compared with China’s WeChat, which came in second place with 1.082 billion MAUs (DeGannaro, 2019; LSE, 2017). According to the LSE report, more than eighty-five percent of Facebook

users are outside of the U.S. (LSE, 2017), meaning that within the U.S., Facebook has roughly 340 million users. According to a report by Hootsuite and We Are Social (2019), China's internet population stands at over 800 million, a penetration of fifty-seven percent of the population, and seventy-nine percent of internet users in China report using WeChat, which means that WeChat reaches roughly 633 million users in China, nearly double the penetration of Facebook in the U.S. This regional specificity presents WeChat and other Chinese social media platforms whose users are likewise concentrated geographically as a significantly positioned marketing opportunity. Regional specificity is evident in the way that *The Great Wall* was marketed on the popular Chinese microblogging site, Sina Weibo (hereafter Weibo) where there was very little reference to the non-Chinese stars, and instead an almost exclusive focus on the Chinese stars and the Chinese director. The Legendary East Weibo account also engaged with cinemagoers, including re-posting images of cinema tickets and responding to good reviews.

The Great Wall utilised their casting of popular Chinese actors by leveraging local talent through exposure on local television programmes and variety shows and taking advantage of the power of the online market through targeted advertising via online ticketing sites and large technology companies, as well as reaching local stars fans via social media. For example, as Joseph Liao (2018) pointed out in his interview, because *The Great Wall* was a Hollywood-China collaboration the producers were able to access talent resources in the form of bankable stars on both the Chinese and non-Chinese side. In addition, marketing in China included a major event called the 'Five Armies Press Conference' in which the film's characters were introduced alongside some of the film's weaponry in order to allow audiences to 'get to know the concept progressively' (Peter Loehr in Frater, 2016a). The marketing benefits of being associated with Wanda, who owned the largest cinema chain in China, as well as distribution, and two marketing companies, 'elevated the film's launch into a national event' including high profile press conferences and promotional events and included screenings in 'an almost

unprecedented combination of formats' including 2D, 3D, IMAX 2D and 3D, China Giant Screen and 4DX (Frater, 2016a). Marketing in the U.S. was less effective, but as Jonathan Landreth (2018) pointed out in his interview, the film did have posters in the New York subway, 'which is by any measure a success'. According to *Variety*, the lengthy post-production process allowed for plenty of time to produce promotional material and more than sixty bespoke video pieces were created for online consumption, in addition to a conventional trailer, a teaser trailer and three music videos (Frater, 2016a). The trailers were reported to have screened ahead of nearly every 'significant' Chinese and Hollywood film in Chinese cinemas from October 1st (Frater, 2016a).

However, there were significant problems with the marketing campaign and paramount among them was the decision to have Matt Damon featured prominently - sometimes exclusively - on film posters and in marketing material. The whitewashing accusations were a consequence of the marketing strategies used. The film posters for the Chinese and North American audiences respectively (see Fig. 3.1 and Fig. 3.2) reveal much about the issue of representation in the film's marketing strategy.

Fig. 3.1: The main theatrical film posters for the North American (left) and Chinese (right) territories (the Chinese poster was used on social media sites, rather than in traditional P&A)



The main theatrical poster for the North American market (Fig. 3.1, left) clearly emphasises Damon's role - his is the only name billed - whereas the main theatrical poster for the Chinese market (Fig. 3.1, right) bills thirteen cast members. Additionally, although Damon is clearly the most predominantly featured character on both posters since his image is larger than any of the others, he is *more* dominant in the North American poster. In the Chinese poster, Damon's character is represented modestly in a profile picture, whereas in the U.S. poster, Damon's character dominates the space, displaying agility and fighting skill. In short, in the U.S. poster, Damon is clearly the main character and is singled out in terms of his characterisation and his importance whereas in the Chinese poster he features as one member - albeit the lead - in a much bigger ensemble. There are five characters featured on the U.S. poster, three of whom are the only three non-Chinese characters in the film (save for the extremely brief scene

involving a band of non-Chinese mercenaries in the film's opening), and thus presenting a majority non-Chinese cast. The Chinese poster features thirteen of the characters, which represents a majority Chinese cast. Clearly, the posters favour the characters that represent the market they are advertising to. Of course the text in the U.S. poster is in English and the text in the Chinese poster is in Mandarin, however, in the Chinese version the title of the film appears in English with Chinese script behind it. This signals an expectation that Chinese audiences will recognise and understand the English text, whereas there is no such expectation for the U.S. audience. The Chinese poster features text in the centre that attributes the work to Zhang Yimou whereas no such credit is given in the U.S. version, showing once again the emphasis on the Chinese elements in the Chinese poster. In the Chinese poster there are three top billed cast members, in order: Matt Damon, Jing Tian and Pedro Pascal, and nine second billed cast members. The mise-en-scène of the U.S. poster is more action focused than the Chinese version, with the U.S. poster emphasising firework-like explosions and colourful contrasts of orange fire against the blue sky. In the U.S. version there is a mountainous backdrop with the Wall itself barely visible whereas in the Chinese version, the Wall is clearly featured. In comparison to the U.S. poster the Chinese poster's mise-en-scène is mysterious; mist enveloping much of the space on the poster and the colour scheme much more subdued and a glimmer of sunshine breaking into an otherwise inauspicious black sky. Overall, analysis of the main theatrical posters for the North American and Chinese markets reveals emphasis on different unique selling points. In the North American example, the unique selling point is Matt Damon and an action theme, whereas in the Chinese example it is the Chinese elements; the Chinese cast and the Wall itself.

Another key distinguishing feature on the Chinese posters is the inclusion of QR codes (see Fig. 3.1 and 3.3) and icons displaying the film's rating on various Chinese social media platforms (see Fig. 3.2). The QR codes cannot be found on the North American posters. This difference demonstrates the ways in which the marketing was tailored to

address the different audiences in culturally relevant ways. The Chinese social media icons would not be recognised by non-Chinese audiences since they are apps that are used almost exclusively in Chinese territories.

Fig. 3.2: Social media ratings featured prominently on Chinese posters



The teaser posters for the Chinese and North American markets (see Fig. 3.3) further reveal similar local targeting techniques but in an even more extreme form.

Fig. 3.3: Example teaser film posters for the North American (left) and Chinese (right) territories



The wall is visible in both, though more prominent in the Chinese poster, and again there is the contrast of the explosions in the U.S. poster versus the clouds in the Chinese version. In the U.S. teaser poster, Matt Damon is the clear focus, the only character visible and billed whereas the Chinese teaser poster focuses on the five army motifs. The High Ranking Industry Person (2018) recalled, the decision to market in that way ‘derailed a lot of hard work’ and caused a backlash that some involved on the project ‘expected but were shouted down’. Chris Anderson (2009: 233) describes how ‘bad films are identified as such long before they are released’; ‘by the time a movie is actually released and reviewed by the big media reviewers, the insider word on whether the film is going to succeed is always spread around the world’. What is of particular importance here is that the Hollywood marketing team prioritised Damon as a selling point, either

without considering the cultural implications, or in spite of the cultural implications. This is reminiscent of Nancy Wang Yuen's (2016) idea of Hollywood's colour blind racism but also indicates Hollywood's reliance on star power and is symptomatic of what Jaap van Ginneken refers to as the 'white superiority complex' (2007: 2), which is aligned with the presence of "white-dominance whitewashing".

Another common problem in marketing is making sure the right message is communicated for the film, that it is pitched right and that any ambiguities are explained. In this instance, the film's director, Zhang Yimou, is well known for directing art films and not Western style blockbusters, so it required sophistication and dedication on the marketing side to effectively communicate that *The Great Wall* was not necessarily going to be like Zhang's previous work. The film, and Zhang's involvement, signify the contraflow of media capital from the West to the East. Wendy Su (2019) writes about the complexity of global media convergence, contra-flow and state intervention in the Hollywood-China relationship, noting that 'various local players also bring their creativity, imagination and strategies into the globalisation process and shape the course and direction of global media flows' (2019: 137). Zhang Yimou's work takes a turn in *The Great Wall*, a shift in focus from the West to the East. As Zhang noted, the rise of the Chinese domestic market meant that his films no longer had to 'rely' on overseas markets (Lee, 2010). The High Ranking Industry Person (2018) noted that because Zhang is a beloved art film director, it confused audiences when he directed *The Great Wall*, which is a 'popcorn movie', 'it needed to be communicated to audiences that this was not an art film', 'it's a popcorn film, it's all about having fun'. The difficulty in marketing the film was not only communicating Zhang's involvement, but also the confusing project itself; the split target audience, the combination of two incompatible systems and visions and, ultimately, a film that sought to achieve a great deal more than it was possible for any one film to do. The appointment of Zhang Yimou as director was also symbolic of the studio's attempt to appeal to Chinese audiences and - more importantly - Wanda. By having Zhang associated with the project, Legendary was

demonstrating its awareness of the market and of the Chinese film industry. However, Zhang experienced a significant amount of resistance from the studio, as is common in big budget Hollywood films, and as a result he was not able to make the film he wanted to. Thus, although on the surface it appears that Legendary was paying reverence to a popular Chinese director, in reality the director was almost certainly inhibited and expected to conform to the expectations of mega-budget Hollywood productions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to outline the third phase of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship - the Chinawood period - as demonstrated by *The Great Wall*. Specifically, the Chinawood period refers to the brief time period 2016-2017 when there was an attempt to move beyond the China-special phase, to *combine* Chinese and North American filmmaking cultures, film markets and cultural values. As this chapter has shown, the pre-production, production, post-production and marketing of the film reveal the attempts to create this kind of partnership, while at the same time demonstrating the obstacles and incompatibilities that problematised the Chinawood period. The experiences of the Hollywood industry personnel interviewed for this research demonstrate the inherent bias towards Hollywood standards, which are assumed to be universal and the gold standard. This created complexity in *The Great Wall* shoot; having to ship personnel and equipment to remote locations in China and having to deal with cultural and linguistic translation.

I have argued that transnational cultural partnerships rely on understanding and appreciation of the other, the willingness and ability to compromise and working towards a shared goal. I have shown how *The Great Wall* failed to achieve these criteria. The problem of linguistic and cultural translation led to miscommunication, misinterpretation, and interference from the studio, ultimately negatively impacting on

the production ecosystem. There was an unwillingness to compromise or “pick a system”; the Hollywood personnel noted a reluctance on the Chinese part to embrace Hollywood ways, indicating evidently there was an expectation that the Hollywood system was the universal language of film. The suggestion being that, because the two systems were so different, they were incompatible, so it was necessary to “pick a system” but the implication is that the Hollywood system would take precedence as the “gold standard”. There was also evidence that the Chinese and Hollywood sides did not share a goal; the suggestion that the Chinese crew were not so focused on the end result, whereas that was the sole focus for the Hollywood team, and the contradicting purposes of the film as both a cross-cultural project and a Hollywood tentpole.

The Great Wall's marketing strategy reveals several key indicators of difference between marketing to Chinese and North American audiences, respectively. Firstly, depending on the audience, different attributes, themes, and characters are highlighted. And secondly, the marketing techniques used show the key difference between marketing to Chinese and North American markets, particularly in the use of social media marketing in China versus traditional P&A (print and advertising) in North America. *The Great Wall* was in and of itself the test case for the aspirations of the Chinawood period. The reception and economic “failure” of the film ultimately ended the Chinawood phase and began the “China and Hollywood redux” period, which will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

Chapter 4

Phase Four of the Contemporary Hollywood-China Relationship: “China and Hollywood Redux” (2017-)

This thesis has discussed at length the significant advantages for both the Chinese and Hollywood industries to collaborate and foster relationships and the multitude of problems inherent to building and enriching these relationships. This chapter addresses the period from 2017 onwards, when significant events were to change the power relations between the industries and, as a result, realigned the expectations of both parties. I term the fourth and current phase of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship as the “China and Hollywood Redux”. Importantly, the China and Hollywood Redux period comes after a series of failures to combine North American and Chinese cultures, film industries and market tastes. The Redux phase is characterised by Hollywood’s retreat from the aggressive desire to combine or join forces with Chinese partners, which distinguished the brief Chinawood period. The China and Hollywood Redux period is thus named because, just as the Chinawood period was characterised by the quest for connectedness, the China and Hollywood Redux is characterised by a return to separateness. As this chapter will show, there are multiple reasons for this retreat. First, the fallout from *The Great Wall* (2016) effectively ended the quest for the fully integrated Hollywood-China collaboration. The critical responses to *The Great Wall* and the lessons learned from its endeavour to create a co-production blueprint are paramount to the ending of the Chinawood period and the start of the Redux phase. *The Great Wall*’s reception reveals not only the differences between the Chinese and North American audiences but also the danger of aggressively marketing to both. The critical reception and economic failure of *The Great Wall* reveal the obstacles, incompatibilities and challenges inherent to the Hollywood-China relationship, which help to explain why the Chinawood phase “failed” and the Redux phase began. This chapter brings together the experiences of production personnel who worked on *The Great Wall*, an analysis of

its performance at the box office, and the critical reception of the film, in order to examine the various ways in which it attempted to address an imagined Hollywood-China intersection. In doing so, this chapter focuses on some of the key successes, failures and lessons learned from *The Great Wall* and the resulting implications for Hollywood-China co-productions in the Redux period. The imagined intersection in this context is a hypothetical common ground that exists between the Chinese and North American film industries, markets and cultures, where shared values facilitate a bridge between business cultures and market tastes. This intersection is problematised by political, cultural, linguistic, economic and spatial incompatibilities, many of which were exemplified by *The Great Wall*'s production process (as explored in the previous chapter) and by the reception of and reaction to the film. *The Great Wall* was widely regarded as a failure due to underwhelming box office returns and a negative critical consensus. By assessing how and why the film attempted to address or traverse the Hollywood-China intersection, the negative response and underperformance can begin to be explained. In this chapter I draw on Thomas Schatz's (2009b) work on film industry studies whereby he argues that analyses of film style, authorship and mode of address enable the effective study of film industries.

Next, this chapter explores the significant increase in the box office performance of domestic films in China during this period, which dramatically shifted the power balance between China and Hollywood, dispelling the myth that China was reliant on Hollywood products and expertise to succeed. To this end an analysis of the Legendary films released in China between 2016-2017³ takes place. Legendary's releases during this time, which were successful in China but by and large failures in the U.S. market, reveal the dangers of "pandering to" the Chinese market that were explored in the previous

³ There is an overlap between the Chinawood phase and the Redux period: *The Great Wall* and *Warcraft: The Beginning* (2016) were released during the Chinawood period but they do not add anything meaningful to the definition or analysis of the Chinawood phase. Whereas when included in the period 2016 to 2017 they effectively demonstrate the transition from Chinawood to the China and Hollywood Redux.

chapter. *The Great Wall* and *Warcraft: The Beginning* (2016), which were released during the brief Chinawood phase, aggressively targeted the Chinese market, which succeeded in China but did not succeed in the U.S. Meanwhile, *Kong: Skull Island* (2017) was less focused on the Chinese market and was a moderate success in both China and the U.S. I argue that Legendary's films during this time alienated the North American market by relying too heavily on transnational storytelling techniques.

The final aim of this chapter is to address and analyse the wider political developments in Sino-U.S. relations that took place during the Redux period, which impacted the Hollywood-China relationship. I show that strategic decisions made by both the Chinese and U.S. governments during this time were indicative of a reversal of the attempts made in the ten years prior to enable mergers and acquisitions (M&As) between the two nations. Specifically, I analyse the acquisition of Legendary by the Dalian Wanda Group (hereafter Wanda). The Wanda takeover is both an example of and subject to the significant events taking place around the time that *The Great Wall* was released, including the tightening of Chinese capital outflow and the increased scrutiny from both Chinese and U.S. governments and is typical of the fourth phase of the Hollywood-China periodisation. The trade press reported that the Legendary deal was 'so off the scale' that it 'allegedly angered Xi Jinping and triggered the early 2017 currency controls that have crimped Chinese deal making ever since' (Frater, 2018). I suggest that the miscalculated "scale" of the deal is accounted for by the lack of recognition of Legendary as a post-postclassical studio. On the back of a trend in Chinese overseas investment, stimulated by Xi Jinping's realigned foreign policy designed to maintain China's rate of growth, and in line with the increase of Chinese funding in Hollywood, there had been speculation that a Chinese company would buy (either outright or into) a Hollywood studio for some time. The 2013 EntGroup Report announced that

acquiring foreign companies in order to expand internationally is a vital strategy for domestic companies. Through mergers and acquisitions, domestic production companies gain access to advanced technology, which compensates for their disadvantage in post-production,

and helps domestic films compete with Hollywood productions' (EntGroup, 2013).

This evident strategy did not account for the post-postclassical Hollywood studio, which is divest of these tangible assets and exists rather as a brand. Thus, Wanda wanted to buy a studio but was instead buying a brand. This misconception is what led the trade press and, ultimately, the Chinese government, to suggest that the deal exceeded the purported value. The acquisition of Legendary by Wanda is the only example⁴ of an acquisition of a Hollywood studio by a Chinese company. Similar to the way in which *The Great Wall* acted as a test case for Hollywood-China co-productions, the Wanda acquisition acted as a test case for Chinese buyouts of Hollywood studios. As this case study illustrates, it is precisely because of Legendary's post-postclassical nature that this acquisition was made possible and also - at least partly - the reason for its failure.

In light of these political, economic, and industrial events and developments, the Redux period refers to a revival of Hollywood's attitude towards the Chinese market and Chinese partners. Hollywood studios have since scaled back on trying to appease the Chinese audiences with the inclusion of Chinese elements in films and have instead gone "back" to making global Hollywood pictures in the hope that they will succeed in China. Although Hollywood films continue to be financed by Chinese money, this was distinctly curtailed by the Chinese government. Simultaneously, the rise in the "quality" and popularity of Chinese films, at least at a domestic level, was established during this period with the success of films like *Wolf Warrior 2* (*Zhàn Láng 2*) (2017). In the "China and Hollywood Redux" period, both sides have retreated and are re-establishing their separate identities. This strategy is working as demonstrated by the box office record of Hollywood releases during this phase.

⁴ This is true up to the time of writing.

The failure of *The Great Wall* marks the end of the third phase of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship and the quest for a “fully integrated” Chinawood production. As the previous chapter has revealed, the film failed to fully integrate the two systems and cultures and ultimately retained the Hollywood method and maintained the belief that Hollywood production practices and film style are still the industrial and cultural gold standard. This aspect of the period is further demonstrated in the details of the Wanda acquisition of Legendary - a deal that, much like *The Great Wall*, symbolised far more than it achieved and, ultimately, failed.

The Great Wall: Reception

The Great Wall was released in China on December 16th, 2016 at the height of a peak season and a full two months before its U.S. release. According to early data, upon its release in China the film achieved the territory’s second largest daily box office of 2016, second to *Warcraft* (Frater, 2016b). The film went on to achieve the fourth-largest opening weekend in China in 2016 and became the second highest December IMAX opening ever (Brzeski, 2016b, Frater, 2016c). Around this time, box office reports in the U.S. were optimistic, using language like ‘standing tall’, ‘muscular’ (Brzeski, 2016b), and ‘smashing’ (Frater, 2016c) in response to the film’s box office success in China. In his interview, Chris Bremble (2018) suggested that the film did well in China because Chinese audiences were curious to see what a ‘big Chinese co-production with Chinese people [looked] like’. *The Great Wall* was released after the acquisition of Legendary by Wanda; the details of the Wanda acquisition will be analysed in this chapter, with attention paid to the benefits that *The Great Wall* received as a result of Wanda’s link to one of China’s largest cinema circuits. The film’s association with China Film Group (CFG) and Wanda gave the film a significant advantage in the Chinese market. When the film was released in the U.S. two months later, it opened to overwhelmingly negative reviews and the box office reflected the negative critical consensus. The press used words like

‘crumbled’, ‘bombing’ (Pressberg, 2017), ‘tanking’ (Loughrey, 2017) and ‘collapse’ (McClintock and Galloway, 2017). Universal Pictures, who partnered with Legendary on the U.S. side, were quick to point out that the ‘the U.S. is not the driving market and just one part of an overall strategy’ (Nick Carpou, president of domestic distribution for Universal, in McClintock 2017). However, the failure of the film in the North American market certainly meant that the film can only be considered partially successful at best. Towards the end of the film’s U.S. theatrical run, press started to report the film was set to lose \$75 million (Loughrey, 2017; McClintock and Galloway, 2017).

In order to analyse the reasons for the film’s failure in the North American market, much can be garnered from the critical responses to the film. In the U.S. press, the vast majority of the reviews for the film were negative. Thematic analysis of the reviews reveals numerous common themes. Most notably, critics were unanimous in their opinion that the film relied on “style over substance” (Morgenstern, 2017; Zacharek, 2017; Dargis, 2017; Nesselson, 2017; Tsui, 2016; Lee, 2016; Orr, 2017; Landreth, 2017b; Turan, 2017; Coonan, Zhu, Rosen and Landreth, 2017b). Accusations of this kind are closely linked to the ongoing debate that surrounds what Geoff King describes as ‘spectacular narratives’ (2000) wherein critics often argue that narrative is halted by spectacular events or objects. However, Simon Lewis (2014) suggests that spectacular sequences still involve the transmission of information at both a narrational and nonnarrational level. Lewis (2014: 216-217) explains that ‘narrational transmission is that element that is aimed solely at providing the spectator with information about the plot...nonnarrational transmission is everything else’. Crucially, these two types of transmission are happening ‘simultaneously all the time’ and that in any given sequence there is a ‘balance of the two’ (2014: 217). Lewis (2014) notes that, broadly speaking, spectacular sequences tend to favour the nonnarrational, but they still represent an ongoing, fluctuating balance that continues to - at greater or lesser degrees - further the plot. In the case of *The Great Wall*, the spectacular sequences certainly contain narrational transmission. Additionally, “style” is also a fundamental characteristic of

Zhang Yimou's auteurism; his work is notoriously visual and artistic. Zhang's use of visual style is also one of the key reasons that his work is often cited as an example of transnational cinema, wherein spectacle storytelling is a key narrative device. Rather than referring to an abundance of excess, the criticism that the film relied on style over substance seems to refer to the apparent lack of narrative cohesion. Geoff King (2000: 2) notes that blockbusters are 'extravagant' and 'spectacle oriented', but still 'tell reasonably coherent stories, even if they are looser and less well integrated than some classical models'. As a transnational narrative, the story must serve to be simple enough to translate easily across languages and cultures. King (2000: 4) notes that 'the desire to appeal to a mass market is likely to produce a degree of built-in *incoherence* and conflicting demands'. Thus, the film's simplistic storyline and spectacular sequences are indicative of the film's genre and intended audience. During their interviews, several of the interviewees referred to the film as a "popcorn/monster movie" (Hedayat, 2018; High Ranking Industry Person, 2018; Landreth, 2018; Walsh, 2018), highlighting the awareness that the film was meant to be "simplistic" blockbuster fare.

The Great Wall exemplifies spectacle storytelling by using spectacular sequences to punctuate the narrative development by featuring and highlighting the film's spectacular landscapes in ancient China as well as the spectacular objects: the Wall and the Tao Tei monsters. This, along with the film's release in multiple formats including 3D and IMAX, clearly promotes the film as something to be seen at the cinema, rather than to watch on a small screen. Aesthetically, the film fits into Hollywood norms in so far as it used classical camera shots and angles, but also implemented a Chinese aesthetic in the colour palette. Jonathan Landreth (2018) noted that 'it's a remarkable film on one level. The technical aspects of the film, the special effects, the sheer scale of it, were sort of classically Chinese in a way, but also made it look like a really bang-up Hollywood monster movie'. The combination of Hollywood spectacle storytelling and the Chinese aesthetic also provided the film with product differentiation. Zhang Yimou is known for his rich use of colour (see for example *Raise the Red Lantern* (*Dà Hóng Dēnglong Gāogāo*

Guà) (1991), *Hero*, *House of Flying Daggers* and *Shadow (Yǐng)* (2018), which all use colour - or lack thereof - in bold ways). In Chinese culture, certain colours are attached to certain values. In classical Chinese art, the primary colours are red, white, black, qing (a mixture of green and blue) and yellow (Cheng, 1986). These colours derive meaning from their association with the Chinese philosophy of (*wǔxíng*), in which there are five elements that relate to a variety of phenomena (Chen, 2014). Not only are these five colours used in the film's core colour palette, but they also represent the colours of the Five Armies in *The Nameless Order*, with the exception of white, which is replaced by purple. Though not a standard colour, purple, is still a traditional colour in Chinese culture and historically represents divinity and immortality and in modern times it represents love or romance (Chinasage, n.d.). Each of the Five Armies in the *Nameless Order* wear armour that is coloured in their corresponding colour palette. This is most evident in the battle scenes where the different armies come together to defend the wall. Each army - and each colour - remains regimented as they each undertake their own specialist tasks: the Bear Troop wear black and are melee specialists, the Eagle Troop wear red and are archers, the acrobatic Crane Troop wear blue and attack from above (a bungee system), the Tiger Troops who wear yellow are the engineers (responsible for the mechanical workings of the Wall) and the Deer Troops wear purple and are horse-mounted. The use of regimented colours coming together to fulfil their individual tasks in a group effort appears as a metaphor for the unification of China's territories to form "One China".

Another common criticism was the idea that director Zhang Yimou's usual style had been "undermined" by Hollywood aspirations (Lee, 2016; Tsui, 2016; Zacharek, 2017; Orr, 2017; Landreth, 2017b). Critics also noted that, within the context of the full film, the accusation of whitewashing was unjust (Lee 2016; Zacharek, 2017; Orr, 2017) with some even suggesting - paradoxically - that the film was a form of Chinese cultural cheerleading (Lee, 2016; Landreth, 2017b; Mendelson, 2017) because of the reverence to China's cultural military achievements and moral superiority. The review in *Variety*

stated, 'In between the cultural cheerleading, there are some highly watchable war and monster spectacles' (Lee, 2016), while *Forbes* suggested 'the entire arc of the movie is watching a white American realise that Chinese army and the Chinese culture is inherently superior' (Mendelson, 2017) and *China Film Insider* opined,

Zhang has created a vehicle to spotlight China as the source of military might and moral right, from an overwhelming number of troops with unshakable loyalty to their emperor, to the magical black powder that "turns air into fire" and the fortitude to use that powder only for good. (Landreth, 2017b)

From a narrative analysis perspective these references are problematised by the white saviour storyline, since it is Damon's character, William, who ultimately saves the Chinese people from their deaths. The cultural cheerleading, then, is better understood as an attempt to appeal to the Chinese film market and the Chinese state bodies. The focus on Chinese achievements - both factual and fictional - is not without its significance, however, and - although undermined by the white saviour trope - there is a propagandist tone to the film. The Wall itself is a metaphor for a reimagined China. It is presented as a feat of engineering, including impressive technology almost futuristic despite the ancient setting. Stefan Landsberger notes (2018: 148) that visual propaganda that exists in public spaces in China often utilises images of the Great Wall alongside 'modern or futuristic images' to represent China's 'ever evolving dreams' of 'the perfect present and a rosy future where China has risen and needs to be taken seriously on the global scale'. In an extra feature on the Blu-ray the Set Decorator, Gordon Sim, explains, 'Some of the weapons used by the army are, sort of, beyond their time. They might be weapons that would be considered to be futuristic in their own time'. Joe Dunkley, Weta Workshop (special effects and props) On-Set Supervisor, explains in the same extra feature that some of the weaponry was based on historical weapons but then made 'larger and to look more visually powerful'. John Myhre, Production Designer, said that 'the interior of the [Wall] set is a bit of a fantasy, but we mixed it into the real scientific achievements of China in the 11th century'. This internal set was conceived as a 'repository for knowledge' and so is packed with scientific

equipment - including all of the historical artefacts that came out of China in the 11th century including the world's first compass, early printing presses and other historical artefacts of Chinese origin. And so it becomes a kind of museum, an exhibition of China's achievements collected together to present the best of the nation. In this sense, Chinese culture and history is presented centre stage while at the same time creating a new imagined history in the futuristic and fantastical advancement of Chinese power. This is an overt example of the way in which the film can be read as a promotion of China's soft power; by creating an imagined history with an advanced hard power, China's *real* soft power - the shaping of appeal and reputation - is strengthened.

Rather than demonstrate any significant shift in power relations between China and the U.S., these Chinese soft-power embellishments are better understood as part of the overarching placation of Chinese audiences and Chinese officials. This appeasement is evidenced by the film's underpinning white saviour narrative but is complicated by the aspects of Chinese "cultural cheerleading". Regardless, from a narrative analysis perspective the film sits comfortably within standard Hollywood blockbuster fare in which the U.S. culture and values are superior. William (Damon), who serves as the film's main protagonist, embodies the role of the white saviour. The two other non-Chinese characters Tovar (Pedro Pascal) and Ballard (Willem Defoe) are villainised and characterised by their greed and untrustworthiness. However, these characters serve to differentiate and promote William as their opposite. Mathew Hughey (2014: 18) writes that white saviour films 'commit a great deal of labour in constructing and fortifying both the category of white racial identity and a normative (and even moral and progressive) pattern of interracial interaction'. In *The Great Wall*, William is a white saviour designed to promote Sino-U.S. relations, through his benevolence and - crucially - his attitude of respectful admiration for his Chinese counterparts and their culture and history. However, he is also a white saviour who enters foreign land and saves the inhabitants from a sad fate. That the Chinese armies are represented in the film as a highly

sophisticated and capable military presence makes William's heroism all the more jarring.

If the main storyline is taken to be the defence of the Wall against the Tao Tei, the underlying narrative appears to be the conversion of William - to teach him the error of his Western ways and the true meaning and value of *Xin ren*. It is the Nameless Order's ability to trust that differentiates them - their ability to have faith in their fellow man and to trust implicitly. Hughey (2014: 12) notes that over time the white saviour metaphor has 'reduced the complexity of an array of interracial and intercultural interactions into a digestible narrative of redemption, individuality and sacrifice'. William's redemption is found in his successful integration into the Chinese army and his denunciation of Western peers. His individuality is shown through the difference between him and Tovar and Ballard. His sacrifice is his modesty.

There was a general consensus that one of the film's major failings was the unoriginal, formulaic nature (Lee, 2016; Tsui, 2016; Landreth, 2017b) and a lack of plot development or narrative coherence (Lee, 2016; Tsui, 2016; Dargis, 2017; Orr, 2017; Landreth, 2017b; Mendelson, 2017; Turan, 2017). Chris Bremble suggested that the film did not perform well outside of China because of, 'a fundamental flaw in the storytelling' in that the 'biggest moment' of the film is at the beginning,

the climax of the movie has nothing to do with the Wall, isn't anywhere near the Wall, and that's confusing because it feels like failure. In a very sort of sublime way the movie is undermined by itself, and that issue of it being undermined, I think is largely what made it not perform well outside of China.

The subtext of the film was the value of trust and of learning from other cultures and the benefits of bilateral action, regarding which Clarence Tsui (2016) notes, 'the banality of this moral is representative of the weightlessness of nearly every aspect of the film: the characters are ciphers, the narrative is dull and even the sights and sounds become numbingly bombastic after a while'. Jonathan Landreth (2018) agreed that the plot

seemed ‘contrived, there were holes in it’ but opined that it was the acting - both Chinese and Western - that let the film down. The acting seemed to Landreth (2018) ‘rather wooden’, particularly Commander Lin (Jing Tian), about whom he noted ‘there was a lot of criticism’. However, the criticism of Jing reveals more about the differing expectations of acting and female roles in Chinese and Hollywood traditions. In Sabrina Qiong Yu’s (2014: 141) work on film acting as a cultural practice and transnational vehicle, Yu argues that there is a deep-rooted tradition in East Asian culture and aesthetics that performances be ‘minimalist’ and ‘unspoken’. Furthermore, Yu (2014: 141) challenges the ‘critical clichés in the Hollywood-centred discussion of transnational film acting, including that the Hollywood realistic acting is the norm against which acting in other cultural contexts should be evaluated; and that a good command of English is fundamental to transnational performance’. The criticism of Jing is an example of the different expectations of Chinese and North American Critics.

Landreth also made an important point on the criticism of the film in China where film criticism does not exist in the same way it does in the U.S. Landreth (2018) explained that the U.S.,

has a tradition of film criticism that can destroy a film because people can speak their minds about films. Not so in China, remember that. You put out a film and the newspapers are not allowed to criticise it because the newspapers at the very back end are tied to the same big companies and government regulators that manage the cinemas. So you would not be allowed to write a critical review.

Although there are certainly similar ties in the conglomerated U.S. system, the difference between the two is still demonstrated by the fact that an “official” system of film criticism doesn’t exist in China. At the time of *The Great Wall*’s release the official mouthpiece for the Chinese Communist Party, the *People’s Daily*, published an editorial on the significant harm caused by ‘malicious and irresponsible remarks’ designed to ‘grab eyeballs’ (clickbait), accusing sites such as Douban as susceptible to hacking,

questioning the legitimacy of the negative reviews, and, most importantly, accusing negative reviews of causing serious harm to the Chinese film industry ecosystem (*People's Daily*, 2016). This lack of film criticism means that in general in the Chinese film market word-of-mouth, most commonly and powerfully expressed via social media and user reviews, becomes all the more important.

Despite its significance to the Hollywood-China co-production industry and its relative box office success in China, *The Great Wall* cannot be considered a success due to its overwhelming failure - both financial and critical - in North America and in the rest of the world. The film's performance and the extent to which it failed reveals much about the way that critics, academics and industry qualify and discuss success and failure. A film's critical reception and audience ratings do not necessarily indicate or reflect a film's performance at the box office and from an industrial perspective, a film's success or failure hinges more on their revenue yield at the cinema and through ancillary markets than on critical reception. Films that receive bad reviews often still "succeed" at the box office. For example, *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016), which scored a meagre twenty-eight percent on the 'Tomatometer' (the percentage of professional critic reviews that are positive for a given film or television show used by Rotten Tomatoes (Rotten Tomatoes, 2019)), took more than \$873 million worldwide at the cinema alone. This disconnect between a film's critical reception and box office yield is best explained by the centrality and financial value of Intellectual Property (IP) and franchise filmmaking in modern Hollywood cinema. Ben Fritz (2018: 85) suggests that increasingly since the turn of the 21st century, audiences have shifted their loyalty from stars to franchises; 'moviegoers looking for the consistent, predictable satisfaction they used to get from their favourite stars now turn to cinematic universes'. Following the stagnant growth in the U.S. domestic box office between 2001 and 2015 and the dramatic growth of international markets, studio executives were urged to 'make fewer, bigger, louder movies' (Fritz, 2018: 22). Fritz explains that studios began to focus on the types of films 'that delivered the biggest and most consistent profits to their publicly traded parent

corporations' (2018: 22), which increasingly meant films that appealed to audiences overseas, particularly China. Fritz notes that international audiences in countries like China were unlikely

to understand the cultural subtleties of an American drama or to consider people talking or even running for their lives to be adequate bang for their buck on an expensive night out. They expected spectacle, particularly if they were paying premiums for an IMAX or 3D screen, and they wanted stories that made sense to a villager in China. (2018: 22)

Furthermore, in the wake of the dawn of a 'golden age of television' (Fritz, 2018: 23), and as more television programming adopts more "cinematic" themes and aesthetics, there is a heightened need for cinema to differentiate its product and so films that favour action and spectacle storytelling, which "need to be seen on the big screen", thus dominate the global box office. This presents a challenge to the previous assumption that, as noted by Hannah Andrews (2014: 6), television has been considered 'culturally and aesthetically inferior to film'. *The Great Wall* is an embodiment of the principles of post-postclassical Hollywood, which is characterised by brand rather than studio, where the brand product is spectacle films. *The Great Wall* typifies the product of post-postclassical Hollywood: spectacle-centred, made-for-the-big-screen, enhanced format filmmaking.

The prospect of defining success and failure in cinema is further problematised by transnational films like *The Great Wall*, since market tastes and box office revenues differ wildly. This is perhaps best demonstrated in the phenomenon of recouping costs at the Chinese box office, as discussed in chapter three. From a financial standpoint, the box office returns from China and the international market total (in excess of \$289 million against a budget of \$150 million) made it a moderate success. However, a domestic U.S. box office return of \$45 million made it an unquestionable failure in the North American market. Consequently, the U.S. press resoundingly proclaimed the film's experiment a failure and as a result questioned the feasibility of a successful Hollywood-

China co-production in the future (Coonan, Zhu, Rosen and Landreth, 2017b; Mendelson, 2017; McClintock and Galloway, 2017; Loughrey, 2017; Galloway, 2017; Brzeski and Roxborough, 2017; Coonan, Zhu, Rosen and Landreth, 2017b). In this way, the critical reception of *The Great Wall* in the U.S. reasserts the hegemony of Hollywood in the global film market by equating failure in the U.S. with overall failure. As Eric Hedayat (2018) observed in his interview, ‘the biggest issue, however you look at it, whether you’re American or Chinese, everybody’s in the game for money. There are very few people that are in it for the love of the art. And it failed at a financial level because it just cost too much and did not make enough’. In his interview, Chris Bremble (2018) observed that - despite the film’s failure in the North American market - *The Great Wall* was ‘very successful for the U.S. side in the sense that Thomas Tull sold his company to Wanda and he made a lot of money’, suggesting that the film was more of a bargaining chip than anything else. Bremble also noted that ‘it was somewhat successful on the Chinese side because the movie performed very well in China, it earned a hundred and fifty million dollars’, but, crucially, ‘it was not very successful for the Chinese - for Wanda, for China Film Group - because it under performed in the rest of the world’. There is an assumption that the film - pre-empted as it was to create the Hollywood-China formula - had a significant impact on the Wanda acquisition and the value of Legendary despite the film having not yet been released. After the film failed the preconceived value of the “successful formula” was nullified. The insights into the complexity of the production process offered by the interviewees reveals both the positive and, more often, negative implications of combining the Eastern and Western production cultures. In doing so, these experiences problematise the industrial level of the China/Hollywood intersection.

The confusion between whether the film was simply a “popcorn monster movie” or an important cinematic contribution is evidenced by the differing opinions between the film’s director and producer. Peter Loehr, one of the film’s producers, stated that the ‘outlook from the beginning was, this is an international, English-language movie with Matt Damon and monsters, and it speaks to a specific demographic, and it happens to

have Chinese themes’ (Loehr in Coonan, 2015b). Zhang Yimou, meanwhile, suggested there was more of a focus on the Chinese elements, stating prior to production that his reason for taking the project on was its focus on China’s culture and heritage; ‘the Chinese elements are leading elements in the film...it’s good for the promotion of Chinese culture. It has historical value for both parties’ (Zhang in Coonan, 2014d). It is common for producers and directors to have different visions for a film but in the case of *The Great Wall* it speaks to the contradictions inherent in the project. It exemplifies the multitude of issues that have been discussed throughout this thesis - co-production, directorial vision, genre, and marketing - and how transnational films complicate and contradict these issues, marking out the incompatibility of the industrial level of the China/Hollywood intersection. As a transnational co-production, *The Great Wall* involved an ongoing negotiation between Chinese and Hollywood industry practices. Based on the experiences of the Hollywood crew, as detailed in the previous chapter, this negotiation was based, from their perspective, on an underlying presumption that the Hollywood system was the default and better system. This presumption was fundamentally challenged by two major counteracting forces; the Chinese director, and the shoot taking place in China. Although early reports made claims that Zhang Yimou was hired to bring his “Chineseness” to the project, to authenticate the Chinese theme, his markedly different ideas about the film’s intention demonstrates the age-old conflict between studio and director, and in this case between a Hollywood studio and a Chinese director. Bennett Walsh (2018) remembered, ‘*The Great Wall* was very much a Western production but with a Chinese director’. Chris Bremble (2018) remembered that this incongruity was frustrating for the director, ‘Zhang Yimou is used to controlling every detail of his films, and when you do a big studio movie for Hollywood, they control the movie and that was frustrating for him’. According to Mark Banks (2010: 252-253), historically, ‘autonomy in cultural production has been associated with freedom from the particular demands and constraints of the commercial world’. Banks suggests that

to speak of “creative” or “artistic autonomy” is to index a particular notion of freedom actively developed in the context of Romanticism. Here, the idea of autonomy was

especially closely linked to the artist; that special, self-regulating being and “free spirit” possessed of rare and precious gifts. (2010: 253)

This kind of Romantic notion of directorial autonomy had been used by Legendary in their branding to establish the company as being a place where directors enjoyed this kind of creative freedom. At the genre level there is also a distinct difference of intention; Zhang clearly pictured the film as a historical epic, whereas the studio saw it as a “popcorn monster movie”. All of these contradictions made the film’s intentions incoherent, which made it difficult to market appropriately.

One of the central ambitions of the film was to find a way to succeed in both the Chinese and North American markets (Qin, 2016; Coonan, 2015b; Tartaglione, 2016; Brzeski, 2016c; Faughnder and Meyers, 2016; Barnes and Qin, 2016). However, this ambitious task required forging an intersection between two very different audiences. There was not only a language barrier to overcome, but a cultural barrier, too. Several of the industry personnel interviewed for this research suggested that the reason that the film received criticism was because of its attempt to appeal to both markets and concluded that, similar to “picking a system”, the film needed to “pick a perspective”. As noted by Bennett Walsh (2018), this impacted upon the story itself, ‘story is king. Just look at *The Great Wall*, we were trying to do both perspectives’. Chris Bremble (2018), meanwhile, suggested that the issues with the story were a result of Thomas Tull’s creative orthodoxy, noting ‘ultimately, despite massive numbers of people and effort, it was really the vision of an individual that could not be altered’.

Eric Hedayat (2018) suggested that the film’s attempt to service both audiences was a significant challenge, ‘it tried to appeal to Western and Eastern audiences and ended up appealing to nobody, in a sense’. Bennett Walsh (2018) noted that in attempting to address Eastern and Western values, the film failed to service either, he observed, ‘in co-productions you have to pick a point of view. Because we had chosen Zhang Yimou we should have just stuck with the Eastern perspective’. Walsh (2018) expanded, ‘I think

the answer is you go in with a Western director- I mean, you pick a perspective. You need to go in with a Western director, lean into the locations, the locations there are fabulous, and tell a Western story, in China. Like a Chinese cowboy Western. That would be fabulous'. Chris Bremble (2018) suggested that 'it was the first bold experiment in trying to make a movie for both markets. And I would say it half succeeded', owing to its relative success in China. Jonathan Landreth (2018) noted that the film was trying to do 'one of the hardest things on Earth, which is to try to use the medium of film to tell a story that basically captures the imagination of two very different cultures'. Landreth (2018) also noted, however, 'the more I look at the way Chinese think about Americans and vice versa, the more I think people should just drop their pride and recognise that actually we are so similar because we are convinced that we are the centre of the universe, each of us'. Here Landreth identifies another problem incumbent upon the Hollywood-China intersection, a cultural stubbornness born from nationalistic or individualistic pride and an unwillingness on both sides to relent. Landreth (2018) explained 'it's very difficult when you're trying to tell a story like that to pay homage to both sides'. The High Ranking Industry Person (2018) explained that,

one of the difficult things about *The Great Wall* was that the goal was to make a film that would work everywhere in the world, that is universally acceptable and popular. It had everything you would think would make that possible: a brilliant filmmaker and a popcorn movie concept (which are often popular) and major stars in the cast (both American and Chinese).

This strategy appears to consider and attempts to address the Hollywood-China intersection at the market level; however, the film's failure shows that this is not the formula for success in transnational filmmaking. When looking at the films that have achieved success in China, they are often unashamedly American in their representation of culture and values. The top ten highest grossing Hollywood films in China (see Table 4) are all examples of unapologetically American films that do not do anything special to cater to a Chinese audience. They do, however, demonstrate key traits that begin to establish a formula for success in China. That is, they are all bar one based on pre-

existing IP, that form part of a wider cinematic universe. The only film that *isn't* based on a pre-sold property is *Zootopia* (2016). Of the ten films, eight were significant box office successes in the North American market (taking a minimum of \$200 million).

Table 4: Top ten highest grossing U.S. films in China (data from *Box Office Mojo*)

Film	Chinese box office (million \$)
<i>Avengers: Endgame</i> (2019)	614.3
<i>The Fate of the Furious</i> (2017)	392.8
<i>Furious 7</i> (2015)	390.9
<i>Avengers: Infinity War</i> (2018)	359.5
<i>Transformers: Age of Extinction</i> (2014)	320
<i>Aquaman</i> (2018)	291.8
<i>Venom</i> (2018)	269.2
<i>Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom</i> (2018)	261.2
<i>Avengers: Age of Ultron</i> (2015)	240.1
<i>Zootopia</i> (2016)	235.5

This pattern also demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between the Chinese film market and post-postclassical Hollywood products, which favour spectacle storytelling, enhanced format franchises based on existing IP. All of the top ten grossing U.S. films in China also share similarities in genre and style, with all of them falling into the blockbuster category and employing action-centred spectacular narratives, as is typical of post-postclassical films. Six of the ten films are based on pre-existing IP (comic book adaptations) and seven are part of a franchise. The key difference between the films in this list and *The Great Wall* is that the latter was not a pre-existing IP and, crucially, that it was designed to attempt to combine Eastern and Western culture where the others did not.

Not being based on pre-existing IP, *The Great Wall* was unable to rely on a pre-existing fanbase. Furthermore, in its characterisation of the Chinese and North American markets and the techniques employed to succeed in each, *The Great Wall* failed to identify an intersection between the Chinese and North American audiences. In addition to the critical consensus in the U.S. that the film was over-reliant on spectacle, it was also heavily criticised for what many referred to as an excessive celebration of Chinese culture (Lee, 2016; Landreth, 2017b; Mendelson, 2017). Indeed, the Chinese armies are represented as highly sophisticated, moral, and well-endowed with scientific and military achievements. Whereas the Western characters are, by contrast, represented as unkempt, greedy, duplicitous mercenaries. Although this may appear to position the Chinese characters and culture as superior, it is a familiar trait of the White Saviour narrative; the ‘stranger in a strange land’ motif (Hughey, 2014: 29). Matthew Hughey explains this trope,

The narrative arc begins with a racist, greedy, close-minded, or otherwise dysfunctional white character. The protagonist then learns the ways of the “natives” and comes to respect them. And finally, the protagonist transforms into their saviour; he rescues them from the problems thought endemic to the culture of their own racial group or rises in power to lead them against some native enemy. (2014: 29)

This is precisely the plot of *The Great Wall*. What makes it so interesting is that, as a film rigidly following a very formulaic and well-worn White Saviour narrative, it still made attempts to appear to revere and pay homage to Chinese culture, most notably in the museum of China’s achievements, and through the re-imagining of an ancient-yet-futuristic Chinese military. An obvious explanation for this is that the “Chinese cultural cheerleading” was a technique used to appeal to an extremely valuable Chinese audience, government and business (Wanda). Zhang Yimou said in a promotional video for the film: (in Mandarin) ‘It is a kind of Hollywood monster movie, but it is carried by an important Chinese-U.S. joint cultural plan’ (Universal Pictures UK, 2017). This idea

that a film could inspire or instigate a coming together of two such historically incompatible nations is an extremely ambitious goal. So much so, that even this claim is perhaps better understood as part of the well-documented attempt on Hollywood's part to appease the Chinese market and potential Chinese investors. As Jonathan Landreth (2018) noted in his interview, 'diplomacy, human relations, international relations are tough stuff. To try to do it in film seems kind of a bizarre fool's errand'. The film was intended to please "everyone" and it has a very clear political and moral message about trust and bilateral cooperation, but it is also a clear example of the White Saviour trope. Landreth (2017) suggested in his review that it felt like the 'core project' was 'to become the first Hollywood-grade Chinese propaganda film'. Although there is evidence to support that theory, it is ultimately undermined by the redemption and revelation of Damon's character as the saviour. In reference to the criticism of the film, Eric Hedayat (2018) noted that he found comments about the way the film dealt with the cultural division between the East and West 'odd', suggesting that critics were reading too much into it, 'I mean, what was that movie? It was a Hollywood popcorn monster movie. And they were trying to make it like it was *The Red Violin* or something'. Clearly Hedayat had a very different idea about the film's intentions, one far more in line with the Hollywood White Saviour star vehicle that strove to appease Chinese audiences with a plethora of Chinese elements.

As this and the previous chapter have made clear by now, *The Great Wall's* highly publicised attempt to create a blueprint for a successful Hollywood-China co-production gave the film - and by extension Legendary - a far greater significance than other Hollywood-China collaborations at the time. In this way, the film acted as a flagship project for the studio's investment in and appeasement of Chinese audiences and the Chinese state. This, alongside Legendary's other "China-special" techniques (such as the formation of Legendary East and the incorporation of Chinese elements, etc.), is likely to have factored into the acquisition of Legendary by Wanda. Bennett Walsh (2018) said: 'we were obviously making a show to sell a company', Walsh continues 'that was not

known at the time and nothing was said - the intent was to make a successful film - but after we wrapped production the company was sold to Wanda and it was obviously part of the reason they wanted to buy it'. Walsh's evidence for this observation lies primarily in that the film could have been made 'for less' if it had not been shot in China, which was done to please the Chinese market. Jillian Share (2018) clarified that the project had been in development for a long time, and that the project just happened to 'heat up' around the time that talks with Wanda were taking place, but that the two were unrelated. Furthermore, Share (2018) pointed out that, 'the Wanda purchase was not until after *The Great Wall* was in the can'. Share (2018) notes that during post-production the 'impending sale' was a consideration, 'certainly in post-production we were definitely dealing with the impending sale. We wanted to make sure without a doubt that it worked in China'. This timing is particularly important because the film had finished production but had not yet been released. Wanda was buying a company that it had reason to believe had just "invented" the Hollywood-China crossover. *The Great Wall* was symbolically linked to the sale of Legendary and, when the film failed, Wanda bore the brunt of it, as will be discussed in the analysis of the merger later in this chapter.

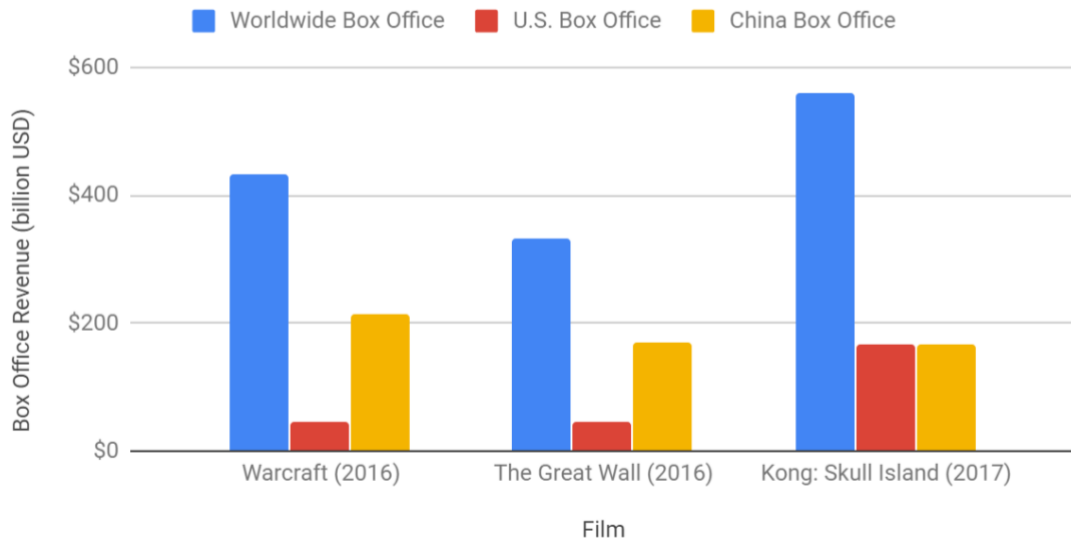
As a test case for the fully integrated Hollywood-China co-production model, the apparent failure of *The Great Wall* in its attempt to combine industrial practices, cultural values and market tastes acted as a cautionary tale for prospective future joint ventures. The abandonment of the quest for the co-production formula is one of the defining characteristics of the Redux phase. However, the failure of *The Great Wall* is only one factor that contributed towards this retreatment. The Redux phase and the return to separateness was also down to wider political, industrial and market shifts as demonstrated by the Wanda acquisition and the Legendary releases in China between 2016 and 2017.

Legendary Releases in China 2016-2017 and the Future of Co-Productions

The period 2016-2017, though short, is perhaps the most important stage in recent Hollywood-China relations because it encapsulates the rise and fall of the quest for Hollywood-China co-productions and Chinese mergers and acquisitions with Hollywood studios, and highlights the re-evaluation of the relationship on both sides in light of deeply significant political events, policy changes and industrial shifts. On the one hand, in 2017 China became the 'primary destination for Hollywood exports' when the Chinese box office outperformed the North American market for the first time (Su, 2019: 141). On the other hand, the *rate* of growth of the Chinese film market slowed dramatically for the first time in years, which, coupled with the weakening of the Chinese yuan and the increase in imported film box office revenue (Brzeski, 2017a) lessened the might of the Chinese market and industry. As a result, 2017 saw a marked change in - or a reassertion of - China's attitude towards Hollywood from a political economic standpoint. The Legendary films released in China during this short period exemplifies Legendary's strategy, bolstered by its connection with Wanda. Even more significantly in determining the fate of Legendary, the box office yields revealed the reliance of Legendary films on foreign box office revenues, particularly China, and the failure of Legendary films in the domestic market (see Fig. 4). This exemplifies the dangers of relying on the Chinese market.

Fig. 4: Box Office Revenue of Legendary Films Released in China 2016-2017.

Box Office Revenue of Legendary Films Released in China 2016-2017



Between 2016 and 2017 Legendary only produced three films and all three were released in China. *Warcraft: The Beginning* (2016) exemplified a number of techniques that were employed by Legendary in conjunction with Wanda and were a result of years of development of relationships between Legendary and Chinese entities. *Variety* reported that *Warcraft*, a film based on a computer game series of the same name, ‘opened six times bigger’ in China than in the U.S., listing the popularity of the game in the Chinese market, the film’s Chinese brand sponsors, preferential release date and Legendary’s data analytics as reasons for this (Frater, 2016d). In addition to the film’s affiliation with Wanda and the support of the Wanda Cinema Line, the film’s equity investors included CFG (with their political affiliation), Tencent (social media giant), Taihe (Chinese distribution company) and Huayi Brothers media (Frater, 2016d), all of whom were strategically positioned to support the release of the film. The High Ranking Industry Person (2018) confirmed in his interview that *Warcraft* had roughly \$250

million in marketing tie-ins from twelve Chinese brands, to support the release of the film. These tactics appeared to work in the Chinese market where the film was the third highest grossing release in China in 2016 (Box Office Mojo, 2019) and the film has a 7.7 rating on Douban (Douban, 2019b).

Warcraft was accused of style over substance (Travers, 2016; Berkshire, 2016). Even the less scathing reviews noted the film's narrative incoherence (Dargis, 2016; Chang, 2016). With eighty-nine percent of the film's box office coming from outside the U.S., the film has been regarded as 'easily is the most lopsided Hollywood release in modern times' (McClintock, 2016) and is a key example of the phenomenon addressed earlier in this thesis about Chinese market making up for domestic losses. The film's success in China also came into question when speculations surfaced that the box office figures had been augmented (Papish, 2016). The problem of Wanda's involvement in the film and its vested interests in it doing well highlighted its power in each stage of the film industry chain. In this way, Wanda is in a position of monopoly similar to the classical Hollywood style control of the industrial chain. Even if ticket fraud accusations were false (there has been no confirmation one way or the other), the issue remains that it could be easy and advantageous for Wanda to take advantage of the system in this way.

Kong: Skull Island, meanwhile, was a moderate success in the Chinese and North American markets, though it finished twentieth and twelfth overall in the 2017 box office charts for the U.S. and China respectively. Unlike *Warcraft* or *The Great Wall*, *Kong* was based on an existing IP and was a sequel to *Godzilla* (2014), which had proved successful in 2014, and the second film in Legendary's MonsterVerse. Reviews for the film in the U.S. were far more favourable than *The Great Wall* or *Warcraft* and often directly compared it to former attempts of a King Kong sequel or reboot, notably Peter Jackson's 2005 remake, and for being more than "just" a monster movie (Gleiberman, 2017; McCarthy, 2017; Schaefer, 2017). The reason for the film's generally positive critical response, and in direct comparison with the other two Legendary releases,

appears to be the story. All three films were effects-driven “popcorn monster movies” but both *Warcraft* and *The Great Wall* were accused of failing to develop their stories and for aggressively marketing to a Chinese audience first. Consequently, both films failed in the U.S. In the case of *The Great Wall* that was down to Chinese cultural cheerleading and underdevelopment of the story and characters, in the case of *Warcraft* this was down to narrative incoherence. *Kong*, meanwhile, did not receive this criticism. The film did, however, employ a China strategy of its own. It was backed financially by Tencent Pictures, the technology conglomerate responsible for popular Chinese apps such as WeChat, which gave the film a significant advantage with marketing in China and the Tencent Pictures logo appears after Legendary’s in the pre-credit sequence. This film, more so than the others, did little “China special” to woo a Chinese audience, though it did cast Jing Tian (San) in a perfunctory role as a biologist. Jing’s name appears fifth in the opening title sequence despite her character only having eleven lines and being entirely inconsequential (she has no impact on the narrative whatsoever), when characters that are consequential and more heavily featured come after her. In this sense, since her character has no impact upon the story, it seems fair to assume she may have been added to cater to a Chinese audience. It appears, however, that the character may have been subject to significant cuts. In a promotional video for the film, Jing describes her character as a biologist who has a ‘firm pursuit of the truth’, who is ‘independent, knowledgeable and determined’ and ‘she knows a lot more than [the] others in the group about all the creatures on Skull Island, including King Kong’ (The Movie Times, 2017). However, none of these characteristics are evident let alone explored in the film. Although Jing plays one half of a scientist team duo alongside Houston Brooks, played by Corey Hawkins, Hawkins’ character does all the talking. Alison de Souza (2017) notes of her casting, ‘she is a prime example of what Chinese critics derisively term *hua ping*, or Chinese for “vases” - actresses whose roles are so insignificant, they amount to little more than set decoration’. In the same article, *Kong* director Jordan Vogt-Roberts and writer Max Borenstein note that there was more to the character in the script and in footage that did not make it into the film (de Souza,

2017). Vogt-Roberts also alluded to the difficulty of bridging the language and cultural divide,

Asked what it was like to work with Jing, he says she was "such a pro and so committed", although he admits "it's so hard with the language barrier to really understand someone". But he reveals that there was a moment when the rest of the cast and crew realised, they had not fully appreciated what she was like as a performer or a person. "We were out one night and saw her dancing - she was trained as a dancer - and she was just so alive and full of energy, and it's so in contrast with this beautiful, proper, talented but quiet person that you meet. And we all realised she's funnier, smarter and more alive than all of us ever knew." (de Souza, 2017)

This apparent lack of "appreciation" is indicative of a wider issue with the Hollywood-China intersection wherein the linguistic and cultural divide obscures or even blocks recognition of the "other side" and therefore undermines the possibility of valuing and respecting one another.

The Legendary releases during this time exemplify how relying on the Chinese market, or aggressively marketing to the global market, can have a detrimental impact on domestic returns. This trade off further complicated the market level of the Hollywood-China intersection. This thesis has tracked the developments in the Hollywood-China relationship and shown that the two are now inextricably linked at a financial and industrial level and in market terms but continue to face numerous problems including an ongoing incompatibility between China and the U.S., a lack of awareness about the Chinese audience, failed attempts at co-productions and business arrangements and, perhaps most significantly, that developing relationships with China cannot happen without the involvement of the Chinese government. The problem of this necessary adherence to the Chinese government is perhaps never more evident than in the events of 2017, when the CPC's realigned strategy towards Hollywood, cultural imports, foreign investments and mergers and acquisitions was dramatically re-shifted to protect Chinese interests. Hollywood's vested interest in the Chinese market and in Chinese

investment was derailed by these developments. Furthermore, by the Redux phase, the Chinese film industry had significantly developed its infrastructure and cultivated its talent pool and as a result Chinese films were starting to compete with Hollywood in terms of box office revenue. In 2017, *Wolf Warrior 2* broke records by achieving more than \$830 million in the Chinese market (Su, 2019). Wendy Su (2019: 147) notes that the film, which was nationalistic in tone, 'illustrates the rising status of their motherland'. Chinese investment in Hollywood dropped from \$4.78 billion in 2016 to \$489 million in 2017 in response to the government's clampdown on foreign investments and amid a crackdown on corruption. Jonathan Landreth (2018) noted that even the co-finance phase between China and Hollywood 'may have paused' while Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign was ongoing in China. Film financing is particularly susceptible to corruption because, as Landreth (2018) noted, 'a movie budget is a great black box because you're never quite sure who's getting paid what'. Nevertheless, the lure of the Chinese market remains. In essence, although the CPC temporarily curtailed certain aspects of the Hollywood-China relationship, the mutual benefits of collaboration and cooperation remain. Su (2019: 146) notes that the strong economic ties that China and Hollywood have built over the past few decades have led to a mutual dependency, 'neither side will prosper without its counterpart'.

This thesis has identified and addressed the issues inherent to Hollywood's understanding of the Chinese market, including but not limited to underdeveloped or manipulated market data, and the political, linguistic and cultural differences. These problems, as this thesis has endeavoured to encapsulate, are deeply complex and are contingent upon the development of Sino-U.S. relations that extends far beyond film. It is of no surprise, then, that according to my interviewees, and in line with current analyses in trade press and academia, Hollywood's China-strategy has shifted yet again. In the Redux phase the Hollywood China-strategy has come full circle, to a point where studios are starting to develop projects specifically for a Chinese audience, while continuing to make globally-minded tentpoles. As the High Ranking Industry Person

(2018) explained, ‘people realised that most of the films that were doing well in China were doing so without doing anything “China special”, the movie just clicked’. The importance of the Chinese market cannot be overstated but being *too* China-focused has been revealed to potentially alienate the North American audience. It is also important to remember that being “China-focused” does not only refer to a focus on the Chinese market but also refers to the appeasement of the Chinese government, which includes abiding by censorship rules and promoting Chinese culture. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the differences between the actual audiences is far less stark than the differences between the Chinese and U.S. governments, as exemplified by the large number of films that succeed in both countries. This factor also helps to account for the phase cycle of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship; the circular nature starting and ending with the two sides maintaining their independence, after a series of attempts to bridge or combine, failed. For Eric Hedayat (2018) the differences between the markets is still a significant problem because, as he put it, ‘China is a very big, very insulated country...they still have a very strong cultural sense...and I don’t know if the U.S. and Chinese cultures can cross and meet, because they’re so different’.

If bridging the cultures is - for now - an untenable task, but the lure of the vested interests of the Chinese and Hollywood parties remains largely unchanged, the industry has appeared to turn back to co-financing and to funding films made for - at least primarily - one market or the other. Peter Loehr (2018) noted in his interview:

Making a film is one of the hardest things you can do and trying to make one that pleases everybody is even harder. It is incredibly ambitious, and it is probably wiser to focus on one market (the U.S. or China). You need to decide on which is your main market - focus there and hope for a crossover.

Loehr (2018) continued, ‘There will definitely continue to be collaboration between China and Hollywood, the question is, at what level? Chinese companies will almost certainly continue to invest in the bigger Hollywood movies, though not at the same fever pitch as in 2015-16’. In his interview, Lindsay Connor (2018) noted that ‘Most films

will play better in one market than another. It's not really that surprising and it does not represent a problem'. Indeed, this has always been the way. When asked about the future of Hollywood-China relations Connor (2018) predicted,

There will be productions that are done primarily for the Western market. There will be productions that are done primarily for the Chinese market. And there will be a few productions that will cross over and play well in both markets. But I do not think that, that will be people's aim for the most part. It's not an easy thing to succeed with and you do not have to succeed with it to be profitable.

Chris Bremble (2018) believes the next phase of Hollywood-China relations will involve solving the difference between the marketing of films in China and North America. Specifically - and in a reversal of the Hollywood-as-superior narrative - Bremble suggested that the U.S. needed to learn from China with regards to marketing techniques that target social media and mobile devices. Bremble suggested that once Hollywood had caught up with China in that regard they could start to 'take more risks with foreign content'. Jonathan Landreth (2018) also suggested that Hollywood practitioners develop their understanding of Chinese culture. Landreth suggested that as industry personnel 'get to know China a bit more and some of them take apartments in China and some of them marry Chinese partners or learn the language or actually live there, god forbid, for a time, and maybe teach, or get transferred there by one of the major studios, for instance', a more detailed and honest understanding will be possible. Of course, the insights and views of the industry people interviewed for this research are highly subjective and part of a wider discourse.

The Legendary releases in China between 2016 and 2017 were both impacted by and demonstrative of the wider shifts in the political, cultural and industrial landscape. These same factors also help explain the critical and financial failure of *The Great Wall* and the failure of the quest for the Hollywood-China coproduction blueprint that fixated the Chinawood period. The Redux period is also characterised by the failure of another defining characteristic of the Chinawood period: the anticipated acquisition of a

Hollywood studio by a Chinese company. The acquisition of Legendary by Wanda was a test case for just such a venture and an analysis of the deal and its wider implications demonstrate this aspect of the Redux period.

The Wanda Takeover

The Dalian Wanda Group (Wanda) is a real estate business founded in 1988 by Wang Jianlin. Under Wang's leadership, Wanda became China's preeminent real estate developer before its diversification from the early 2010s (Brzeski, 2016d). Wang, who was named China's richest man between the years 2013 and 2017, has been a prominent figure of Chinese foreign investment and had, as a result, been viewed favourably by the Chinese government. As Wendy Su (2016) notes, Wang's conscious effort to exert Chinese soft power overseas earned him good standing with the Chinese Communist Party. Wanda diversified into cinema operations in 2005 when it founded Wanda Cinemas and in 2013 Wanda bought AMC Cinemas, the U.S. cinema chain that had been actively seeking investors for some time. Between Wanda Cinemas and a revitalised AMC, as well as global acquisitions of domestic cinema chains, Wanda controlled the largest number of cinema screens across the globe (Forsythe, 2015). Wang made it clear that, in his own words, his target for Wanda was 'to be one of the world's biggest companies in the culture industry, this is why I have not retired yet' (Wang in Coonan, 2013). In September 2013, Wanda broke ground on the Qingdao Movie Metropolis, the company's first foray into the film studio business. The 'glitzy' ground-breaking ceremony, attended by Hollywood and Chinese stars including Leonardo DiCaprio, Nicole Kidman, Jet Li and Tony Leung as well as Hollywood industry moguls such as Harvey Weinstein and Rob Friedman (Frater, 2013), was a tribute to Wanda's ambitions for not only the studio but the company. *Variety* reported that the Metropolis, which was at that time anticipated to cost \$4.9 billion to build, would include twenty sound stages, a ten-thousand metre studio complex, hotels, an indoor theme

park, a film exhibition unit, an IMAX research laboratory, as well as a film museum, waxworks, year-round automobile show and yacht-trading centre over a 200 hectare plot (Frater, 2013). Wanda had also made very visible moves as a film financier, most notably as the primary financier of *Southpaw* (2015) (Brzeski, 2016e).

Wang registered early interest in purchasing a Hollywood studio and had previously been linked to possible buyouts of Lionsgate, MGM, and DreamWorks (Frater, 2016d). Speculation about Wanda's interest in Legendary started in December 2015 (Rainey, 2015) and on January 11th, 2016 Wanda acquired a majority controlling stake in Legendary for \$3.5 billion, marking the first acquisition of a Hollywood company by a Chinese company. This thesis has already questioned the extent to which the Wanda acquisition was part of a long premeditated strategy by Legendary. Certainly, thanks to the inroads made by Legendary in its China-focused strategy, which have been charted and analysed at length throughout this thesis, Legendary was an attractive option for Chinese takeover. The acquisition was described as a 'merger' in a statement by Wanda though it was made clear that Wanda held an outright majority stake (Frater, 2016e). For this reason I refer to it as an acquisition - that is, an asset bought - rather than a merger. *Variety* reported that the terms of the deal transferred one hundred percent of the equity in Legendary to Wanda, which would then reincorporate the studios in accordance with U.S. and Chinese tax structures (Brzeski, 2016e). According to Wang's comments at the time of the announcement the deal was solely about 'making money' as opposed to any soft power ambitions (Wang in Frater, 2016e) but given Wang's track record as an ambassador of Chinese soft power that seems unlikely. Legendary was an appealing choice because of its aggressive drive towards the Chinese markets and its consequent upwards trend in popularity in Chinese territories, and *The Great Wall* is thought to have been a key driver, too, which had not been released yet but was hotly anticipated (Burkitt and Fritz, 2016; Brzeski and Kit, 2016). The acquisition of Legendary set Wanda up to create a global entertainment powerhouse, adding to the company's portfolio of global cinema chains, theme parks and film studios. Wang also alluded to

the value of Legendary's experience, 'we have much to learn. The Chinese film industry is thirty to fifty years behind that of the U.S.' (Wang in Masters, 2016) and added that the Legendary products would, 'certainly boost our tourism and cultural businesses', which included theme parks and studios. In the same way that Legendary's film lent themselves to Universal theme parks, they would lend themselves to Wanda's theme parks. In addition to which, Tull's analytics software - the Eddington program, part of the Applied Analytics Group - was no doubt an attractive add-on.

Tull's decision to sell the company was financially motivated. Legendary had recently lost money on a string of underperforming films such as *Crimson Peak* (2015), *Blackhat* (2015) and *Seventh Son* (2014). In addition, since Legendary did not own any of its key franchises - the *Batman*, *Superman* franchises owned by Warner Bros. and the *Jurassic World* franchise belonging to Universal - it was dependent upon co-producing partners. Legendary's attempts to start their own franchises with their own IPs were failing. As a private company, without the advantage of having its own distribution arm, Legendary did not have the same access to equity and debt financing that other major Hollywood studios do, making it all the more imperative that films earn a return on investment. Legendary's valuation at the time of the acquisition was questioned by industry analysts and most agreed that, rather than the industry transforming event that many purported it to be, it was another example of Tull's deal making expertise (Masters, 2016). However, the association with Wanda gave Legendary more than just financial advantages. As the world's largest film exhibitor (Brzeski, 2016e) Wanda was positioned to give Legendary films a significant advantage in the global exhibition market.

One of the significant critical aspects of the Legendary-Wanda deal was the difference between Wanda's expectations and the reality of the Legendary deal. Wanda wanted to buy a Hollywood studio in the classical sense; that is, a major entertainment company that owns studio facilities, that has a library of film products and has secured rights to IPs and existing franchises. However, as this thesis has gone to lengths to determine,

Legendary - as a post-postclassical studio - was in effect little more than a brand. Despite Wang referring to the deal as being a financial rather than political endeavour, this is complicated or contradicted by other comments he made about the cultural significance of the deal. For example, when the deal was approved by the U.S. Commerce Department, Wang stated, 'it is quite a feat for an acquisition to be approved by the U.S. Department of Commerce in such a short time. This reflects the positive attitude that the U.S. government has towards Sino-U.S. cultural exchange' (Wang in Frater, 2016f). There was a significant vested interest on the U.S. side - but here Wang links the deal to wider Sino-U.S. relations which suggests the deal was perhaps more financially focused than culturally significant. The relationship between Legendary and Wanda cannot be separated from politics because of Wanda's relationship with and adherence to the Chinese Communist Party. The Legendary-Wanda deal concerned the Chinese and U.S. governments. Members of the U.S. congress voiced concerns about Chinese acquisitions of Hollywood assets and questioned whether private companies - such as Wanda - may be fronts for government-orchestrated takeovers (Lang and Maddaus, 2016). Deals like Wanda's were under additional scrutiny for indicators of corruption, or as Wendy Su (2019: 145) notes, the Chinese government's 'suspicions regarding the real motivation for these deals, which smack of money laundering and the transfer of capital from China to foreign countries in the name of overseas acquisitions'. This "suspicion" is an extension of the misunderstanding and mistrust that has overshadowed Sino-U.S. relations. It also speaks to the soft power tug-of-war, only this time it was the U.S. side that was fearful of domination by a Chinese company.

Legendary was fundamentally a film financing company in its formative years, then becoming a post-postclassical studio through processes of branding and by attempting to develop its own intellectual properties with *The Great Wall* and to acquire the rights to properties such as *Godzilla*. Even within its self-made post-postclassical status Legendary remained largely a financier. Tull's reputation for claiming ownership or responsibility for films that Legendary only financially invested in was one of the main

reported reasons for the demise of the relationship with Warner Bros. Tull's personal branding as a fanboy-producer/auteur, itself a trait of post-postclassical Hollywood, is further complicated by Tull receiving a producer credit on the films *Legendary* co-produced with traditional Hollywood studios (Warner Brothers and Universal). This was in keeping with the post-postclassical industrial trend of awarding producing credits to financiers and other individuals who do not undertake the duties of a producer. So, then, rather than buying a "film studio" in the traditional sense (that is, a film production company that produces and distributes films), Wanda bought a post-postclassical studio - a brand - and a film financing company. This is, in large part, the reason why the valuation for the studio was considered too high (Frater, 2017b, Guy, 2018; Masters, 2016). In order to make the valuation seem fair, *Legendary* would need to make the transition from financier to independent studio with a portfolio of original and acquired intellectual property rights. This would entail a dramatic reconfiguration of the studio, which further undermined Tull's reported expectations that little would change about the day-to-day running of the business. From the outset, Tull made it clear that Wanda's acquisition was unlikely to affect *Legendary*'s creative choices, and that there was no defined 'plan' (Brzeski, 2016e; Frater, 2016f). Tull reaffirmed to *Variety* that *Legendary* was a 'personal thing' and that he is 'pretty hands on' and was 'planning to continue working on all of it', going so far as to say that both sides were 'insistent' that they 'run operations in the way that we always have, but now with bigger muscles behind us' (Tull in Frater, 2016g). Tull and Wang also appeared to have different takes on whether the plan was to take *Legendary* public in China, with Tull stating that they did not have, 'any definitive plans' and Wang stating that he planned to start pursuing an initial public offering of Wanda's film production and distribution operations, which would likely entail a restructuring of *Legendary* (Brzeski, 2016e).

Wanda's Demise

The demise of Wanda - the company's fall from favour with the Chinese government and resulting corporate downfall - encapsulates China's ongoing struggle to balance its global aspirations while maintaining its cultural and economic protectionism. It is another example of the contradiction between China's socialism and capitalism or the ongoing negotiation of Deng Xiaoping's socialist market economy. Having led the reverse flow of media capital since 2012 (Su, 2019), China's globalisation of Hollywood is epitomised by Wanda's acquisition of Legendary. However, rather than signalling a new industrial landscape this significant event had the opposite effect. The major impact of the deal was the role it played in scaring the Chinese and North American governments into clamping down on mergers and acquisitions and increased scrutiny of financial investments, signalling a distinct retraction and a reinforced protectionism. In a turnaround of policy, and in stark contrast to the government's previous initiatives to incentivise global engagement and exertion of soft power, the Chinese Communist Party turned about-face and imposed a crackdown on precisely the kind of overseas investment strategies adopted by Wanda (Su, 2019). Wanda's acquisition of Legendary appears to be the last in a series of disappointing events that led to the Chinese government taking action. As previously mentioned, the Wanda acquisition was widely regarded as a bad deal, or as Wendy Su notes, 'overpriced and insufficiently profitable' (2019: 145). At the time trade press questioned whether the acquisition, which made Legendary a nominally Chinese company, may have been able to bypass the foreign film quota in China (Brzeski, 2016f; Frater, 2016g). However, this prospect was complicated by the idea that, if it was able to, it would completely undermine the principle of the system. The films that the studio had in production were decidedly American and did not bear the characteristics that China requires of domestic films. In this sense it revealed a loophole in the system which, if it was able to succeed, would present a significant problem to Chinese domestic cinema. This is an example of the contradiction between Chinese protectionism and China's desire to continue its economic growth and

soft power expansion by acquiring powerful studios. In deciding whether Legendary would be able to bypass the foreign film restrictions, the Chinese government would have to decide what was more important. On the one hand, the limitation and regulation of foreign films in China and the protection of domestic cinema, on the other, the push to build China as a force in the global film industry.

Wanda's demise is inextricably linked with the decline in power of Wang himself. Wang can be seen as a victim of the changing attitudes and policies of the Chinese government, however. The government, in their bid to curtail the real estate over-development in China, had incentivised businesses like Wanda to diversify, meanwhile the government was also telling people in the film industry to use their tools to promote Chinese culture (Su, 2019). Wang's aggressive overseas expansion attempted to fulfil these incentives. Then, in 2017, largely as a response to Wanda's acquisition of Legendary, the Chinese government tightened its control over foreign investment. The Chinese government's concern over capital flight and excessive borrowing and clamping down on Wanda, which was at the forefront of both, was the ideal way to do that. Wang's loss of favour began in 2016 when the Chinese government disapproved of his aggressive overseas expansion programme (Frater, 2018a). Soon after the acquisition of Legendary, Wanda had its shares suspended from trading (Brzeski, 2017b). Wang also had trouble reorganising his film assets and went back on plans to integrate Legendary with the Wanda Cinema Line (Frater, 2016h). Part of the problem was that the Hollywood company would need to be fundamentally reorganised in order for it to fit within Chinese regulations. Another reason was that, having suffered losses in 2015, Wanda wanted the studio to run independently for a while to demonstrate stability and allow for earnings forecasting (Frater, 2016h). In 2017, Wang started selling assets and reports stated that Chinese authorities had ordered banks not to lend Wanda money for any of its overseas assets (Frater, 2017c). Wanda's attempt to buy Dick Clark Productions was also denied by the Chinese government (Lang and Maddaus, 2017). In July 2017, Wanda sold nearly \$10 billion of real estate and tourism projects to Sunac China, in order to

clear debts (Chow, 2017). The following month, rumours circulated that Wang had been detained by Chinese authorities, which prompted him to threaten legal action against media outlets ‘spreading fabrications about the company’ (Frater, 2017e). Wang’s reputation in the U.S. was also damaged by a series of comments made in 2016. At a Hollywood event hosted by Wanda, Wang noted that, since the Chinese audience tastes have become more sophisticated, Hollywood studios needed to improve the quality of their output, specifically calling Hollywood out for lacking originality (Barnes, 2016). This is an interesting reversal of the construction of Hollywood films and industrial practices as “superior”. The same year he threatened the U.S. President-elect Donald Trump, warning that the twenty thousand North American citizens he employed in the U.S. ‘might be out of jobs’ if Trump went ahead with the measures of U.S. protectionism and anti-China policies he had talked about during his presidential campaign (Brooks, 2016).

Almost a year after the Wanda acquisition, and exactly a month before the release of *The Great Wall*, Tull resigned his position as chairman and CEO of Legendary (Ford and Masters, 2017). Tull was under pressure from the Chinese government to make the Legendary deal seem legitimate and worth its valuation. The valuation was tied to the anticipated success of *The Great Wall*, and thus the pressure on the film - and by extension, Tull - was doubled. It is of no coincidence that, at the time of Tull’s resignation (January 17th, 2017) the box office in China had slowed, meaning its total for the territory was revealed, and the first reviews for the film had started coming in from “the West” and were resoundingly negative. If, as this thesis has suggested, the fate of the Wanda deal indeed rested on *The Great Wall*, there can be no better indication of the deal’s failure. Within a few months of Tull’s departure, Peter Loehr resigned as CEO of Legendary East (Brzeski, 2017c) and then Jack Gao resigned his role as senior vice president of the Wanda Group, where he had been filling the role as interim CEO of Legendary (Frater and Nyren, 2017), fulfilling the complete reorganisation of Legendary’s personnel.

The story of the Qingdao Movie Metropolis epitomises the rise and fall of Wanda and the problems incumbent upon the development of China as a film centre of the world. In 2016 Wanda, together with the Qingdao Municipal government, announced an ‘unusually high’ forty-percent production rebate to any film wanting to use the Qingdao studios (Frater, 2016i). In doing so, it provided a competitive advantage for filming there. However, critics were fast to point out that the downsides far outweighed the incentive. In particular, that the studio was in China meant that it - and by extension the films shooting there - would be limited by government regulations, underdeveloped talent pools and the problems of shooting in a remote part of rural China (Cain, 2017b; Ma and Schwartzel, 2016; Chow, 2018). One of my interviewees, Adam Wheatley (2018), worked on one of the few Hollywood films to be shot there, *Pacific Rim 2* (2018). Wheatley recalled that the production was the first to operate in the Qingdao studios and that there were significant issues. Wheatley remembered having to explain what they would need and what processes they would need to put in place. Wheatley also noted that the cost of filming in Qingdao was comparable to other high-end studios and ‘at times a little more expensive than Pinewood Studios in London and it’s like, “well, why aren’t we in London? Why the hell are we out here in the middle of bloody nowhere?”’ According to Wheatley (2018) the studios themselves were of a high quality - he explained that Wanda had used people from Pinewood Studios to help in the construction process - but that there were notable discrepancies, including a lack of make-up rooms and no recreation rooms for the stars and ‘strange things like that’, even the way they charged for the rental - charging by the square meterage and for the electricity - and described the back-and-forth explaining ‘what normally happens’. Jonathan Landreth (2018) noted in his interview that the Qingdao studios remained ‘largely unoccupied’ and pointed out that the studio is just part of a ‘giant real estate bubble’, and that Wanda ‘tried to put lipstick on a pig’ by calling it a cultural investment rather than real estate because the government were discouraging real estate builders from over-building at that time and cultural endeavours were being incentivised by the government. It speaks to the viability

of the project that the only Hollywood films reported to take advantage of the Metropolis, even with the rebate, were *The Great Wall* and *Pacific Rim 2* (Chow, 2018).

The Wanda acquisition and demise demonstrates the ongoing hurdles that face the Hollywood-China relationship. As this thesis has shown, these inherent issues have prevented successful Hollywood-China partnerships and co-productions. As the Legendary micro-history has demonstrated, various attempts have been made to find ways to access Chinese money - both in terms of investment and in tapping into the world's fastest growing film market. These attempts are undermined, however, by an unwillingness on either side to navigate the Hollywood-China intersection on an equal footing.

Conclusion

The fate of *The Great Wall* marks the concluding chapter of the Hollywood majors' quest for a Hollywood-China co-production. The film attempted to chart the imagined Hollywood-China Intersection, as the most concerted effort - at least at face value - to achieve the highly sought after Hollywood-China partnership. As the previous chapter has shown, *The Great Wall* encapsulated the third phase of the periodisation of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship as the only real example of a high profile attempt to combine both Chinese and Hollywood production practices and audience tastes. However, as has been outlined, this "attempt" was largely superficial, placating Chinese partners and audiences as opposed to creating a balance between the two. The film's critical and financial failure marked the end of the possibility of further - and perhaps more legitimate - attempts. Thus, the film's reception and the lessons therein exemplify the transition to the fourth and final phase of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship, in which the industry has come full circle and realised that attempts to combine are unlikely to succeed. Instead, the tried and tested technique of aiming for

one audience and using one system and hoping for a crossover have been resumed. Just as *The Great Wall* acted as a test case for the Hollywood-China co-production blueprint, the acquisition of Legendary by Wanda acted as a test case for China's highly publicised quest to buy out a Hollywood studio. In a fate similar to that of *The Great Wall*, the acquisition reveals much about the obstacles and incompatibilities of such a venture.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research has been to chart and analyse the relationship between Hollywood and China between 2005 and 2017. Using Legendary Entertainment as a case study, I have shown how Hollywood business strategies were adapted to appeal to Chinese audiences and financiers in light of the rapidly growing Chinese film market. In the process of analysing Legendary's formation and conduct I have identified changes in Hollywood economics, style and industry, which I term the post-postclassical Hollywood era. In post-postclassical Hollywood, films rely more heavily on outside funding, particularly from Wall Street and private equity, where the boundary between financier and producer are blurred. Post-postclassical films are typically enhanced-format products that are reliant on existing intellectual property (IP), they are often franchises and favour transnational spectacle-based storytelling. Post-postclassical Hollywood studios fundamentally exist as brands and film production, funding, marketing and distribution are shaped by the logic of branding. Legendary is a prime example of a post-postclassical studio; built on the financial backing of private equity and Wall Street financing, focused on fanboy-fare, essentially a film finance company that branded itself as a production company. The identification of post-postclassical Hollywood as the contemporary period in Hollywood history builds on work by Paul Grainge (2008), Geoff King (2002), Ben Fritz (2018) Edward Epstein (2005) and Tino Balio (2013). Paul Grainge's work on how Hollywood employs branding to create competitive advantage and how branding impacts film experience acts as a starting point for the investigation and identification of post-postclassical Hollywood. Rather than simply a facet of Hollywood's economic, stylistic and industrial character, branding is the defining characteristic in post-postclassical Hollywood. Writing in 2002, Geoff King's exploration of New Hollywood cinema begins to make the connections between the big and small screen, in particular how film style in New Hollywood is inspired and impacted by music videos and advertising. In post-postclassical Hollywood this connection is brought to the fore and

has been updated according to advancements in technology and ancillary markets. Ben Fritz's (2018) work on franchise filmmaking suggests that the Hollywood industry is being reinvented; with the focus now being on making franchise films for fanboys and funding films with outside and overseas investment. Edward Jay Epstein (2005: 351) identifies the shift towards younger audiences and the technological breakthrough of digitisation and enhanced-format filmmaking, both of which characterise the post-postclassical period. Epstein predicts that Hollywood's 'traditional culture' will be replaced by 'computer culture' and that the boundary between overt 'conventional' advertising and covert product-placement and merchandise will become ever more blurred. In post-postclassical Hollywood these predictions have become reality. Tino Balio (2013) characterises Hollywood in the new millennium as 'more cautious'; opting to reduce overheads and reinvest in blockbusters, focusing 'almost exclusively on tent-poles and franchises'. Balio identifies the internet and video on demand (VOD) as changing consumer demand. The post-postclassical Hollywood model is based on these collective principles and Legendary Entertainment offers a key example of these principles in practice.

Legendary's status as a nascent company confounded the traditional formal distinctions between studio, producer and financier. Ultimately, in its formative years, Legendary was a financier. However, the Legendary strategy at this time was not that of a financier. Legendary clearly had producing aspirations from the start, as demonstrated by the associative branding of Thomas Tull as a producer/auteur. This split personality was further complicated by the terms of the Warner Bros. deal, which included the provision for Legendary to develop projects that would - potentially - be jointly financed and produced by Warner Bros. Moreover, Legendary was given the *title* of a production company - with the Legendary logo following that of Warner Bros. at the start of all the films Legendary co-financed from the beginning of their relationship. This meant that, before Legendary had actually developed or produced any of its own projects, it had already been able to establish its reputation as a production company based on the

success of Warner projects such as *Batman Begins* (2005), *Superman Returns* (2006), *Inception* (2010), *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *The Hangover* (2009). Although Legendary only acted as a co-financier on these projects, through a strategic branding exercise, the company successfully created an image for itself as a production company. Thus, Legendary exemplifies what I have termed a “post-post-classical Hollywood studio” wherein a production company exists only as a brand and a purveyor of intellectual property (IP) and is distinguished by its complete divorcement from all the traditional assets associated with a traditional Hollywood studio.

Tull’s personal branding as a fanboy-producer/auteur led to the conceptualisation of the financier/producer-auteur. This new way of conceptualising the role of the producer helps to demystify the trend of “handing out” producer credits to personnel who do not actively produce the film. The financier/producer-auteur role, as in the case of Tull, is another example of the post-post-classical industry. In the same way that the post-post-classical studio exists only as a brand, divested of the physical elements that make up a studio in the classical and post-classical eras, the post-post-classical producer is constructed via personal branding, as in the case of Thomas Tull. Tull, particularly in Legendary’s formative years, did not have authorial input into the films that he was “producing”. He was a financier masquerading as a producer, in a similar way to the way in which Legendary was a finance company masquerading as a studio. This conceptualisation is based almost entirely on a calculated rhetoric reported by the trade press that, while not necessarily untrue, was carefully designed to acquire funding, to create a brand image and to position Legendary - a nascent film finance company - as a post-postclassical studio. With the exception of his contribution towards the concept for *The Great Wall*, Tull’s “authorial authority” was instead cultivated as part of his “mythology”. Specifically, Tull was characterised as a fanboy, and as such was anchored to the lucrative fanboy brand. Both Tull and Legendary were branded specifically to serve the fanboy brand. While the focus of this research has been on Legendary - and

by extension Tull - specifically, the findings will aid in future research into the role of the financier/producer-auteur.

The way in which Tull and Legendary's image was constructed was strategic and was infused with the principles of post-postclassical Hollywood. Firstly, Tull's personal branding as an example of the American dream and as a "unique" savvy Wall Street businessman made Legendary a viable investment opportunity when it had no experience or track record. In other words, it started life as a brand with absolutely nothing else attached. Even at this point, the company's first deal with Warner Brothers was sizable and unprecedented in many ways. Then, crucially, Tull was branded repeatedly as a "fanboy", a lover of comics, superheroes and computer games. Thus, Tull was positioned as an insider with the key demographic of post-postclassical Hollywood: fanboys. Building on work on fandom by Henry Jenkins (1992) and work on fanboys by Suzanne Scott (2013) and Naja Later (2019), this thesis furthers the understanding of the importance of the fanboy audience and the fanboy-auteur. As this research identifies, products made by and for fanboys have become the most lucrative brand in Hollywood. Post-postclassical Hollywood products are catered to this demographic above all others. Thus, by branding Tull as a fanboy-producer/auteur and Legendary as a fanboy-auteur brand, the company was built around the principles of post-postclassical Hollywood.

The post-postclassical Hollywood period reveals much about the globalisation of Hollywood in the Twenty-First Century. Post-postclassical Hollywood economics, style and industry are fundamentally globally-minded. The contemporary Hollywood-China relationship is itself an example of Hollywood's increasing reliance on international finance and international markets. The extent to which Hollywood adapted its China-focus and implemented a China-strategy - by including "China-special" elements, release dates, promotional events, etc. - demonstrates the financial imperative of securing theatrical exhibition in Chinese territories. The findings of this research contribute to the

existing literature that questions or offers a more complex understanding of Hollywood's assumptive global domination (see for example Tsing, 2000; Miller et al., 2009; Curtin, 2007; Mirrlees, 2013). The examination of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship, the commentary in the trade press and the experiences of industry personnel included in this research reveal the undermining of the assumption that Hollywood films and industrial practices are the "gold standard" or the "Hollywood-as-superior" narrative. The reluctance and in some cases refusal of Chinese partners, politicians, investors, policies to "*kowtow*" to Hollywood partners and politicians directly weakens Hollywood's global reputation as the dominant force.

The post-postclassical Hollywood model has a very symbiotic relationship with Chinese audiences and financiers. In post-postclassical Hollywood, films are funded largely with outside private investment. Although it is very difficult to prove when and how Chinese finance, specifically, is involved in private funds such as hedge funds and private capital, it certainly happens. For example, the High Ranking Industry Person (2018) confirmed that Wanda had invested in Legendary films prior to the acquisition. Post-postclassical film style is most commonly aimed at the fanboy market; favouring enhanced-format, spectacle-oriented, transnational storytelling, which is precisely the kind of film that typically is granted a release in Chinese cinemas. This is not by accident, of course. Rather, it demonstrates the effectiveness of Hollywood's evolving global strategy.

The act of tracing Legendary's varied connections with Chinese entities in the context of wider industrial, political and cultural events, led to a periodisation and terms to describe the different types of contemporary Hollywood-China relationships. This periodisation and definition of terms is particularly important because of the scale and rate of change in Hollywood-China relations and the deep impact that the Chinese market has had on Hollywood strategies. Within the time period 1994 to 2017 the Hollywood-China relationship falls into four key phases that reflect the various methods by which Hollywood attempted to capitalise on China's opening up to the global film

market. The first phase, which spans 1994 to 2010, is termed the “China and Hollywood phase” to highlight the separateness inherent in the relationship. During this time the Chinese film and exhibition industries were in a state of development and the might of the Chinese film market, though growing, was not yet sizable enough for Hollywood studios to adopt a China-focus. Specifically, during the China and Hollywood phase Hollywood was not doing anything “China-special” - a term that I use to reference the second phase of the periodisation. In the “China-special” period, between 2011 and 2015, the Chinese film market was the fastest growing film market in the world. This period is characterised by Hollywood’s shift to a China-focus and the variety of macro- and micro-level China-strategies that were developed in order to play to the sizable market. At the macro-level, U.S. politicians put pressure on the Chinese government to relax access restrictions. At the micro-level, as demonstrated by Legendary’s China-strategy, studios began including Chinese elements in films and marketing to Chinese audiences. These China-strategies were specifically designed to appeal to the CPC and to Chinese investors as well as Chinese audiences. In the China-special phase the quest for the Hollywood-China co-production began since such a project would be able to circumvent the quota and offer a more substantial share of the box office. The pursuit for connectedness is what characterises the third phase in the periodisation - the “Chinawood” phase. The Chinawood phase is encapsulated in the high-profile test project of *The Great Wall*, a film designed to produce a blueprint for a “fully-integrated” Hollywood-China co-production model. However, the obstacles and ultimate failure of the film led to a “return to separateness” in the fourth and final phase; the “China and Hollywood Redux”. As well as signifying the cautious retreat from the quest for the Sino-U.S. co-production, the Redux phase was also marked by a reversal of U.S. and Chinese political strategies that had previously sought to create collaborations in the form of mergers and acquisitions.

The four phases are dictated by political, economic and industrial events that impacted and shaped the way in which Hollywood acknowledged and catered to Chinese

audiences, investors and policy makers. While other authors have written about the post-1994 relationship between Hollywood and China, there has not been a formal periodisation of this trajectory. The periodisation offers a necessary delineation of contemporary Hollywood-China relations, which have had a significant impact on Hollywood economics, industry and style. Each of the stages in the periodisation also exemplify the ongoing negotiation of Hollywood's global position. In the first and - arguably - second phases Hollywood was certainly considered the dominant force in the relationship. However, the Chinese film market, production industry and exhibition industry were developing at such an unprecedented scale during this time that by the third and certainly fourth phase, this was no longer the case. Thus, this research contributes to existing literature on Hollywood's global character by revealing the developments and obstacles inherent in Hollywood's China-strategy.

In offering insight into the machinations of Hollywood's global outreach, this research also contributes to the existing literature on the role of cinema as a conveyor of soft power. Each phase represents a tug of war between Hollywood's desire to continue its capitalist expansion, and the Chinese government's cultural and economic protectionism. The reluctance on both sides to concede power or influence to the other is evidenced throughout the periodisation. What is particularly interesting is that while Hollywood's global standing remains largely the same throughout the time period, the Chinese film industry undergoes dramatic development during this time. As a result, the power balance is constantly being negotiated. Despite the vested interests of both the Chinese and U.S. parties, Sino-Hollywood relations exhibited the same tensions as wider Sino-U.S. relations; dogged by misunderstanding and mistrust. As such, the ongoing struggle over soft power - and the use of cinema as a communicator of such power - has undermined the Hollywood-China relationship.

One of the crucial elements charted within this periodisation was the increased interest in Hollywood-China co-productions and the obstacles inherent to such projects. The

third phase of the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship - the Chinawood phase - was extremely short but extremely significant as it encapsulates the “failure” of the quest for the “fully-integrated” Hollywood-China co-production, as demonstrated by the experiences of production personnel working on the flagship project, *The Great Wall* (2016). At the time of writing, *The Great Wall* is the first - and last - “real” foray into a fully-integrated Hollywood-China collaborative production. Finding a formula for the Hollywood-China co-production was an industrial imperative between 2010 and 2016, since co-productions were almost guaranteed a Chinese release and, crucially, were considered local productions, thus avoiding the film quota and benefitting from much higher box office yield percentages. However, the experiences of the production personnel revealed that there existed practical, cultural and linguistic incompatibilities that undermined the film’s production. Furthermore, *The Great Wall* demonstrated the pitfalls of making films for a combined Chinese and North American audience.

The issues faced by *The Great Wall* in its attempt to combine Hollywood and Chinese industry cultures and film markets augments existing scholarly work on transnational cinema. It is my finding that from the Hollywood-side, in most cases, the attempt to create, foster and indulge Chinese partnerships was predominantly a technique used to appeal to the Chinese government and Chinese investors so as to secure Chinese funding and theatrical distribution in Chinese territories, rather than to create fully integrated partnerships. As an example of this, Legendary East acted as a “China agent” rather than the collaborative Hollywood-China co-production venture it was purported to be in the trade press. The Hollywood-China relationship cannot be examined as extraneous from politics and the issues of mistrust and misunderstanding that have long characterised Sino-U.S. relations have likewise distinguished Hollywood-China relations. The process of analysing the production process and the critical reception and financial performance of *The Great Wall* revealed much about the problems inherent to transnational filmmaking. Specifically, a case study of the film revealed the obstacles involved in combining Chinese and Hollywood filmmaking practices and cultures as well as the

problems of trying to make a film for both audiences. These issues are inherent both to the process of making a “fully integrated” Hollywood-China co-production and to making a film pitched at a combined Chinese and North American audience, which suggests that transnational cinema is problematised by competing soft power ambitions and incompatible national identities.

If the Chinawood phase is best summarised as the quest for connectedness, the fourth phase - the Hollywood and China Redux - is best summarised as the return to separateness. The events of 2016 to 2017 and the resounding failure of *The Great Wall* caused many to question what the future held for Sino-U.S. co-productions. At the time of writing, it seems likely that co-productions will go back to being largely financial arrangements, that Hollywood will no longer attempt to combine cultures but rather work on catering to ‘global audiences’ and, ultimately, that the nature of the relationship between China and Hollywood has changed. In his interview, Chris Bremble (2018) highlighted his hope for co-productions,

There is great hope for co-productions. I think that what’s happening now is Hollywood and the Chinese industry have retreated a little bit from one another. And the Chinese industry is growing up and maturing, and it’s doing that very quickly. Hollywood is also evolving and changing quickly. And I think that when those two constituents can come together as equals, then I think we’ll see co-productions be successful.

Bremble’s observations are optimistic given the history of Hollywood-China relations and wider Sino-U.S. relations but he makes an important point, that the landscape on the Chinese side is changing quickly and dramatically. As this thesis has shown throughout, one of the fundamental discourses surrounding the Hollywood-China relationship is the idea that China is dependent on Hollywood expertise, technology and industrial standards. This circulating discourse, which benefited the Hollywood side, continues into the Redux period but it is even more questionable because of two significant factors: the “coming of age” of the Chinese film industry and, consequently,

the dramatic improvement in the performance of domestic films in the Chinese market. Even with this rate of change, however, it seems unrealistic that two such opposing cultures and political systems will ever be able to come together as equals without fundamental changes taking place in both the political and cultural realms. This equality, or even an honest mutual appreciation or understanding, is of particular importance in co-production settings. In his interview Jonathan Landreth stated, ‘I don’t think we ever really got to a period where co-productions were really happening. I think there was a lot of talk of it but there are only a few examples’. Landreth suggested that most co-productions are in reality co-financing arrangements. As it stands, despite the lure of the benefits of co-productions, through trial and error Hollywood appears to have concluded that such endeavours are too problematic. The High Ranking Industry Person (2018) noted in their interview that people in Hollywood have realised how ‘tricky’ co-productions are; ‘if they do decide to do one, they are very careful about it’. Bennett Walsh (2018) was clear, ‘I think Hollywood is scared off of that right now. Getting fifty percent of the box office is not worth doing it, for a lot of shows’. The incompatibilities revealed between the production practices, the audiences, and the cultures makes fully-integrated collaborations high-risk, in a risk-averse post-postclassical era.

In a continuation of the Hollywood-system-as-superior narrative, most of my interviewees referenced either the need for the Chinese film industry to develop or “catch up” to Hollywood or noted the dramatic rate at which the Chinese film industry is doing just that. Bremble (2018) suggested,

At the same time the Chinese markets can say, “we now can make content that has the polish and shine that works for you, so you do not have to bring all your people over here and spend all that money, so we can make the product at a more reasonable price for both markets”, then I think we’ll see a new generation of co-productions that can ultimately be successful.

This quote picks out two key points, or caveats for a successful Hollywood-China production partnership: that the Chinese film industry needs to improve to achieve the

‘polish and shine’ that Hollywood expects as well as the issues with filming in China. Bremble (2018) expanded,

As the mainland film industry can make movies that have the finish of, you would say, of a Hollywood movie, then co-productions can be a little bit easier to meld, because you won't be putting a whole bunch of foreigners on planes, flying them into an industry where their creativity is respected but their craft is probably not engaged. Meaning they do not know how to do things in the Chinese industry, because they're done differently here.

Although Bremble and other interviewees are contributing to the circulating discourse that China needs Hollywood, they are also clearly pointing out that the two systems are different. In this sense the “immaturity” of the Chinese industry appears directly linked with its incompatibility with or deviation from the “Hollywood standard”. Meanwhile, Adam Wheatley (2018) described the significant advancements made by Chinese colleagues and noted that, ‘the old way of doing Chinese film will change in the next ten years because you’ve got all these people who have been foreign educated’. Wheatley (2018) described a ‘marked improvement’ in conceptual thinking of Chinese Concept Artists. Wheatley pointed out that the best Chinese Concept Artists work abroad - not in China - and that, as a consequence of this creative talent deficit, in the past he has experienced problems where colleagues have not had some of the requisite skills needed and he has had to ‘give them a lesson or two’ in things like two- and three-point perspective. However, Wheatley believes that the ‘future bodes well’ because of the improvement in the quality of work.

Chris Bremble (2018) highlighted the need for the development of options for ancillary revenues in China, noting ‘I think that the next generation of co-productions will come when the studios have better integrated models with streaming sites where they own their own streaming business so the ancillary revenues on movies are a little bit more robust for them than they are today’. Bremble (2018) also noted that in China there remains a lack of what he called ‘an organised studio structure’. For example, Bremble

noted that, as far as he was aware, there are currently no studio-level post-production executives, 'So companies that might be spending twenty, thirty million dollars a year on visual effects do not have anyone that is tasked to oversee that spend. And then even on individual productions it's very rare for us to have experienced visual effects producers or post-production supervisors on the project'.

The task of bridging the Chinese and U.S. cultures and markets has been identified in this thesis as one of the most problematic and ultimately undermining aspirations of *The Great Wall* and of co-productions in general. In their interview, the High Ranking Industry Person (2018) shared,

The concept of making a film that can bridge these two cultures and have equal success in both is logical, it seems like it should be possible, but I do not think anyone has achieved it just yet. It is perhaps an impossibility but maybe someone will crack it someday. I've worked on so many co-productions and I thought we had cracked it with *The Great Wall*, but it is really, really hard.

The reporting of *The Great Wall* as a failure better exemplifies the value judgement made between the Chinese and U.S. markets - the idea that its failure in the U.S. trumped its success in China. This value judgement is yet another example of the inequality between China and Hollywood. Success in the Chinese market falls into two categories: those films that are a success in China but not in the U.S. (*The Great Wall* and *Warcraft* are examples) and those that succeed in both markets (*Rogue Nation* and *Kung Fu Panda 3*). The inherent bias towards the U.S. market deems only the latter a true success. In the case of *The Great Wall*, owing to the film's inflated budget, it needed to succeed in both markets to truly be considered a success. As Mendelson (2017) suggests, the film proves that large budget films cannot 'just depend on China' to turn the film into a financial success.

Having identified the problems they experienced on *The Great Wall*, I asked my interviewees for suggestions on how they would avoid similar problems in the future

and a key conclusion was drawn: the need to pick one system or the other (Chinese or Hollywood) rather than combining them. Eric Hedayat (2018) exemplified the benefits of picking a system, pointing out that he knew colleagues working on projects in China who had made the decision to adopt the Chinese system and hire an entirely Chinese crew, and had experienced far less problems as a result. Adam Wheatley (2018) asserted, 'it's very easy to make it work if you implement the right processes'. The experience of the production process of *The Great Wall* revealed Chinese and Hollywood film practices to be largely at odds and the task of combining them to be significantly problematic. As Chris Bremble (2018) noted in his interview, 'it was a very interesting look at an intent to merge two cultures in a very specific industry and it presented lots of challenges'. That the crew concluded that the best way to overcome the problems they experienced was to pick one system or the other - thereby avoiding the intersection - reveals the complex nature of the Hollywood-China intersection at the industrial level. Eric Hedayat (2018) recalled that the conflict between the systems and the ongoing negotiation was 'probably the biggest hurdle' he faced on the production. Hedayat explained, 'if you and I were to say, "let's go make a movie in China" and you just embrace what they do there and do not try to make it your way, it's going to go a lot faster and smoother than trying to- they're trying to bring a right-hand drive car onto a left-hand drive street and it's confusing'. Despite this apparent willingness to "embrace" the Chinese style, a Hollywood studio film would almost certainly not in reality be willing to choose to eschew Hollywood practices for Chinese ones. Hedayat's comments are more indicative of the problem of combining the systems than an openness to working the Chinese way. Based on his wealth of experience working on Hollywood-China co-productions, Adam Wheatley (2018) highlighted the importance of communication, suggesting when working on a co-production, 'everyone has to sit at the same table' and decide on a system, which everyone will follow. Wheatley also explained the importance of having a system of accountability, 'at the end of the day you need to have one person who's making the 'yes', 'no' decisions' so that, that person is accountable'. Wheatley recalled that producers in China 'will try and infiltrate, will try and divide and they pick

on people. So I just try and stop a lot of those things from occurring'. Wheatley's personal attempts to traverse the Hollywood-China intersection are a microcosm of the wider problems that this thesis has sought to identify; the issues of communication and incompatibility that problematise the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship.

This thesis has, by way of a micro-history of Legendary Entertainment, offered insight into contemporary Hollywood industry practices at a time when the Chinese film market has been opened up and the Sino-Hollywood relationship has been brought to the forefront of film industry studies. In doing so, this research has contributed to the academic field of film industry studies in four key ways. Firstly, it has defined a new era in Hollywood film industry, style and economics, which has been termed "post-postclassical" period. Secondly it has provided a new conceptualisation of the role of the producer, identifying the blurring of lines between financier and producer and highlighting the currency of the fanboy-producer/auteur. Thirdly, it has defined a periodisation and terms to describe the contemporary Hollywood-China relationship by presenting Legendary Entertainment as a valuable case study that exemplifies the current and recent state of transcultural/transnational relations between Hollywood and China. Finally, through the assessment and analysis of the obstacles inherent in the process of undertaking a "fully integrated" Hollywood-China co-production and in making films for a combined Chinese and North American audience, this thesis has built upon existing work on transnational cinema to suggest that transnational cinema is problematised by the ongoing negotiation and competition of national soft power ambitions, capitalist aspirations, differing market tastes and industrial incompatibilities.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Box office rankings of Warner Bros. films released between June 2005 (1st Legendary partnered release) and May 2014 (last Legendary partnered release). Releases in partnership with Legendary highlighted in yellow.

	Film	Total WW Gross
1	Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2 (2011)	\$1,341,511,219
2	The Dark Knight Rises (2012)	\$1,084,939,099
3	The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey (2012)	\$1,021,103,568
4	The Dark Knight (2008)	\$1,004,558,444
5	Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1 (2010)	\$960,283,305
6	The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug (2013)	\$958,366,855
7	Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (2007)	\$939,885,929
8	Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (2009)	\$934,416,487
9	Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (2005)	\$896,911,078
10	Inception (2010)	\$828,322,032
11	Gravity (2013)	\$723,192,705
12	Man of Steel (2013)	\$668,045,518
13	The Hangover Part II (2011)	\$586,764,305
14	I Am Legend (2007)	\$585,349,010
15	Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows (2011)	\$545,448,418
16	Godzilla (2014)	\$529,076,069
17	Sherlock Holmes (2009)	\$524,028,679
18	Clash of the Titans (2010)	\$493,214,993

19	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (2005)	\$474,968,763
20	The LEGO Movie (2014)	\$469,160,692
21	The Hangover (2009)	\$467,483,912
22	300 (2007)	\$456,068,181
23	Sex and the City (2008)	\$415,253,641
24	Pacific Rim (2013)	\$411,002,906
25	Superman Returns (2006)	\$391,081,192
26	Happy Feet 2006)	\$384,335,608
27	Batman Begins (2005)	\$374,218,673
28	Terminator Salvation (2009)	\$371,353,001
29	The Hangover Part III (2013)	\$362,000,072
30	The Great Gatsby (2013)	\$353,641,895
31	300: Rise of An Empire (2014)	\$337,580,051
32	Journey 2: The Mysterious Island (2012)	\$335,260,290
33	The Conjuring (2013)	\$319,494,638
34	Ocean's Thirteen (2007)	\$100,086,793
35	The Blind Side (2009)	\$309,208,309
36	Wrath of the Titans (2012)	\$305,270,083
37	The Departed (2006)	\$291,465,034
38	Sex and the City 2 (2010)	\$288,347,692
39	We're the Millers (2013)	\$269,994,119
40	Gran Torino (2008)	\$269,958,228
41	10,000 B.C. (2008)	\$269,784,201
42	Dark Shadows (2012)	\$245,527,149
43	Journey to the Centre of the Earth (2008)	\$241,995,151
44	Argo (2012)	\$232,325,503
45	Get Smart (2008)	\$230,685,453
46	Yes Man (2008)	\$223,241,637
47	Green Lantern (2011)	\$219,851,172

48	Valentine's Day (2010)	\$216,485,654
49	Due Date (2010)	\$211,780,824
50	Horrible Bosses (2011)	\$209,638,559
51	Yogi Bear (2010)	\$201,584,141
52	Watchmen (2009)	\$185,258,983
53	He's Just Not That Into You (2009)	\$178,846,899
54	The Bucket List (2007)	\$175,372,502
55	Magic Mike (2012)	\$167,221,571
56	Four Christmases (2008)	\$163,733,697
57	The Book of Eli (2010)	\$157,107,755
58	The Town (2010)	\$154,026,136
59	Crazy, Stupid, Love. (2011)	\$142,851,197
60	The Dukes of Hazzard (2005)	\$111,069,515
61	The Campaign (2012)	\$104,907,746
62	42 (2013)	\$95,020,213
63	Where the Wild Things Are (2009)	\$77,233,467

Figures taken from *Box Office Mojo*, retrieved on 20/10/2018.

<https://www.boxofficemojo.com/studio/chart/?page=1&yr=&view=company&view2=allmovies&studio=warnerbros.htm&p=.htm>

<https://www.boxofficemojo.com/studio/chart/?page=2&yr=&view=company&view2=allmovies&studio=warnerbros.htm&p=.htm>

Appendix B

Box Office Returns of Top 10 U.S. Films in China 2010. (Legendary/Warner Bros. films highlighted blue)

Movie Title	Studio	MPAA Rating	Box office WW	% WW	Box Office US	% Dome- stic	Box Office China	% China
Avatar (2009)	Fox	PG-13	\$2,787,965,087	72.7	\$760,507,625	27.3	\$204,129,854	7.32%
Inception	Warner Bros.	PG-13	\$828,322,032	64.7	\$292,576,195	35.3	\$68,445,823	8.26%
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1	Warner Bros.	PG-13	\$960,283,305	69.2	\$295,983,305	30.8	\$33,250,471	3.46%
The Expendables	Fox (Lionsgate)	R	\$274,470,394	62.4	\$103,068,524	37.6	\$31,778,656	11.58%
Clash of the Titans	Warner Bros.	PG-13	\$493,214,993	66.9	\$163,214,888	33.1	\$25,000,000*	5.07%
Resident Evil: Afterlife	Sony	R	\$300,228,084	80	\$60,128,566	20	\$21,640,678	7.21%
Shrek Forever After	Paramount, Dreamworks	PG	\$752,600,867	68.3	\$238,736,787	31.7	\$13,465,361	1.79%
Knight & Day	Fox	PG-13	\$261,930,436	70.8	\$76,423,035	29.2	\$13,419,677	5.12%
Unstoppable	Fox	PG-13	\$167,805,466	51.4	\$81,562,942	48.6	\$9,854,870	5.87%
The Sorcerer's Apprentice	Disney	PG	\$215,283,742	70.7	\$63,150,991	29.3	\$9,048,334	4.20%

(Source: *Box Office Mojo*) (*Source: Screen Staff, 2010)

